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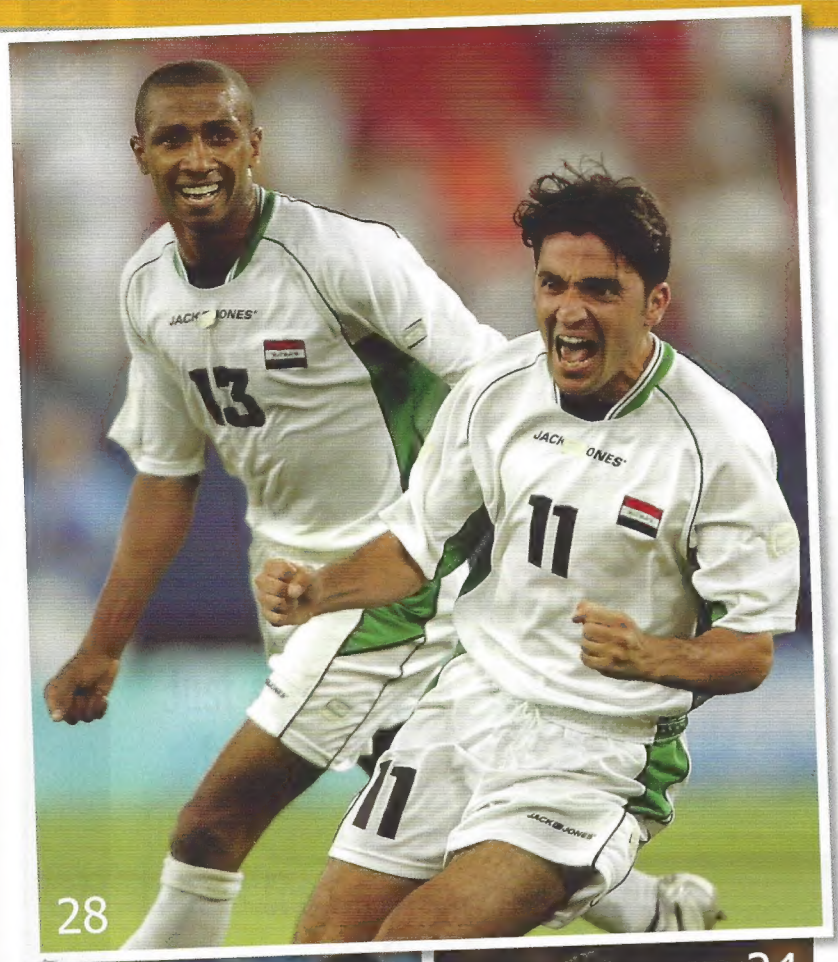

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FRANK LOWY AC

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRMAN

"Just as Australia's future is closely linked with Asia so, too, is the future of Australian football"

The Qantas Socceroos continue their qualifying campaign for the 2010 FIFA World Cup tonight against Iraq, whom I am delighted to welcome to Australia.

Iraq is the current champion team of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and are exciting and formidable opposition for Australia.

It is also a pleasure to return to Brisbane for a World Cup qualifying match after many years absence. Suncorp Stadium is a great football stadium and is a venue of which all of Queensland and Australia can be proud.

There have been many landmark occasions for football in Australia in recent years, but none quite as significant and as important for the long term benefit of the game than the challenging journey to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Just as Australia's future is closely linked with Asia so, too, is the future of Australian football, and this is our first World Cup qualifying campaign as part of the AFC.

From a football perspective, being part of the AFC gives our nine national teams high quality opposition every time they take the field, as well as the potential for an extended qualification campaign.

High quality opposition benefits the entire football family in Australia. It helps us to improve our own standards, quality of play, coaching and facilities; and, as the quality of our national teams improves, the impact will be felt down the line to the grassroots players which, turning full circle, gives us a larger pool of potential players for the national teams.

The AFC format also gives Australian fans a feast of football to enjoy and more opportunity than ever before to show support for the Qantas Socceroos.

Thank you to all our partners for their support for tonight's game, and a big thank you to all the fans for your passionate and colourful support of our national team.

My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match for all.

Frank Lowy AC
Chairman
Football Federation Australia

Queensland Government

The Queensland Government **welcomes the Iraq national football team** to Queensland for their game against the **Qantas Socceroos** and wish both teams **all the best** for an exciting game.

Proudly supporting Soccer in Queensland

www.sportrec.qld.gov.au

Queensland Government

JUDY SPENCE

WELCOME TO SUNCORP STADIUM

"Football brings different cultures together, teaches the spirit of fair play and promotes a healthy and active lifestyle"

It is a privilege to welcome the Qantas Socceroos and the Iraq national football team to Queensland's Suncorp Stadium as they continue along their path toward the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

In recent years the Queensland Government has invested $280 million to redevelop this venue into one of the most exciting stadiums in the world.

Queenslanders are proud of Suncorp Stadium and for good reason. It puts fans very close to the action and that creates an electrifying atmosphere.

It is a fitting venue for our Qantas Socceroos to host international matches and showcase their exciting brand of football.

Football brings different cultures together, teaches the spirit of fair play and promotes a healthy and active lifestyle.

The Queensland Government has contributed millions to the development of football. We will continue to support the game and nurture the talents of our young players – the next generation of Qantas Socceroos.

On behalf of Queensland I wish the Qantas Socceroos and the Iraq national football team the best of luck in tonight's qualifying match.

Judy Spence

Judy Spence
Queensland Minister for Sport

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MILLIGAN BOOSTS BEIJING QUEST IN GOSFORD

At the end of last year, the Qantas Under 23s were at the climax of their epic qualifying campaign on the road to this year's 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Between them and their Olympic dreams stood the Iraqi side, themselves a fine team that had knocked Australia out of the 2004 Athens Games. Adding more heat to the clash was the success Iraq enjoyed over Australia last year at senior level in the AFC Asian Cup.

Prior to this, Australia's second last group match, the Aussies stood in second place behind Iraq. But after Adrian Leijer had scored in the first half, Mark Milligan's 58th-minute header was the breakthrough that revealed the Olympic light at the end of a very long tunnel.

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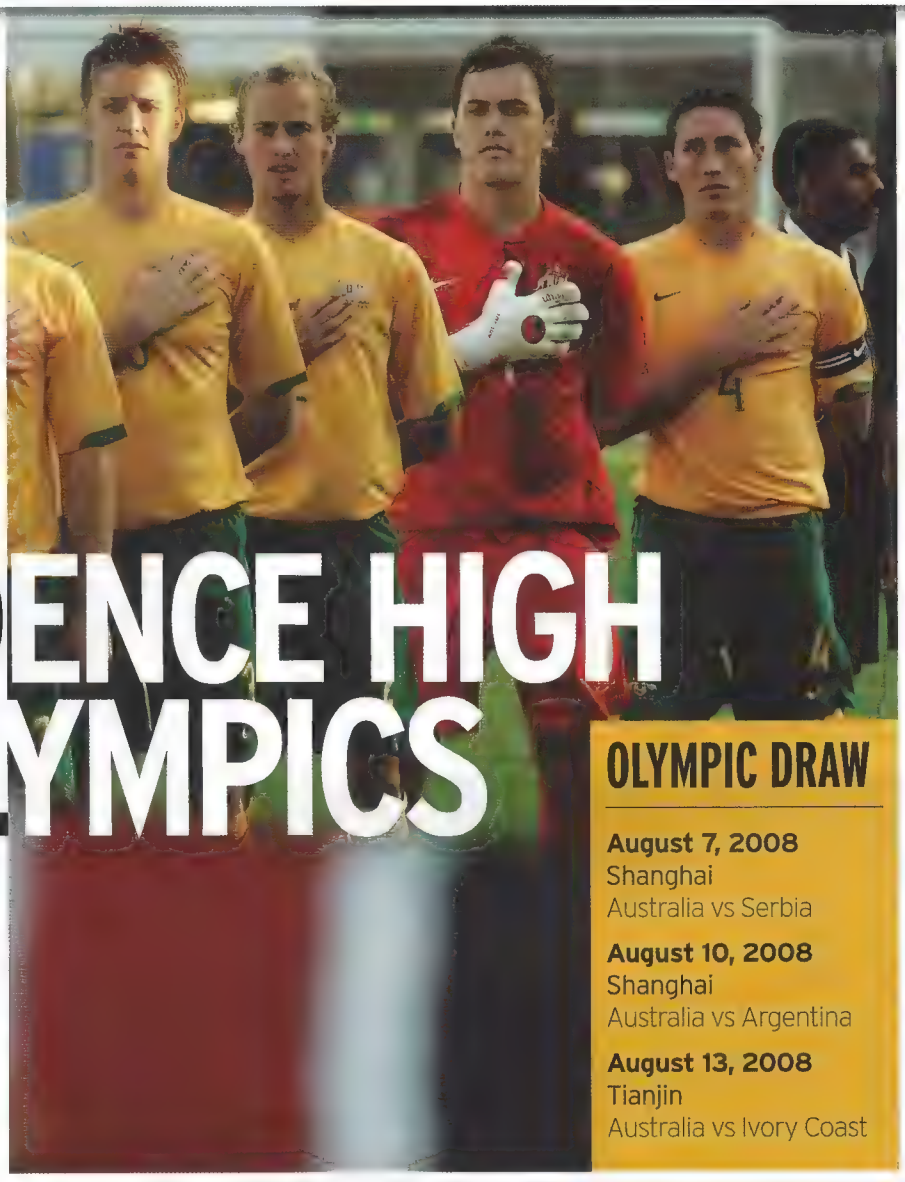

CONFIDENCE HIGH FOR OLYMPICS

Qantas Under 23s coach Graham Arnold believes that similarities between the recent draw for the 2008 Beijing Olympics football tournament and the 2004 version will work to his side's advantage.

Just like in 2004, Australia drew Argentina, Serbia and an African nation (Ivory Coast in 2008 compared with Tunisia in 2004) and Arnold is hopeful of emulating the performance of four years ago when the team made it out of the group stage.

"Last time we had a similar group and we did very well to make the quarter-finals," said Arnold, who was an assistant coach in Athens in 2004.

"We know we can get through this group, we have history and also we have had such a tough schedule just to make it this far which will hold us in good stead.

"Playing in Asia has taught us a lot about the conditions we will face in China and that could give us an advantage."

Arnold said he expects the team to play at least 12 to 13 games between now and the opening match.

"The preparations will be better than I had hoped for and we will go there to be successful.

"Also it's been a bonus to have so many of the players involved with the Qantas Socceroos," added Arnold.

Australia's opponents have been impressive in their qualifiers. Defending champions Argentina qualified after finishing runners-up to Brazil in the 2007 South American Youth Championships. Serbia made the final of Europe's 2007 UEFA Under 21 Championship and Ivory Coast topped their final qualifying group in Africa with a comprehensive five wins from six matches.

Australia is yet to win a medal at the Olympic Games having had their best finish of fourth in Barcelona in 1992, when they lost to Ghana in the bronze medal match.

OLYMPIC DRAW

August 7, 2008
Shanghai
Australia vs Serbia

August 10, 2008
Shanghai
Australia vs Argentina

August 13, 2008
Tianjin
Australia vs Ivory Coast

DID YOU KNOW?

Graham Arnold can select a squad of just 18 for the Olympic Games. This includes three over-age players and two goalkeepers, leaving just 13 places for outfield players aged 23 and under.

Test awaits Qantas Joeys

AUSTRALIA

The Qantas Joeys face a tough path to the 2009 FIFA Under 17 World Cup following the Asian qualifying draw, with Australia grouped with Saudi Arabia and China – both two-time Asian champions – and Turkmenistan.

The 16-nation AFC Under 16 Championship will be held in Uzbekistan from October 4 with the top four nations to qualify for next year's FIFA Under 17 World Cup in Nigeria.

"This would undoubtedly be the toughest group on paper but the most difficult thing is that we don't yet know the relative strengths of most of the teams," said Australian coach Martyn Crook.

"Both Saudi Arabia and China have twice previously been crowned Asian champions and have a strong record at this level. Turkmenistan is a neighbouring country to the hosts and will to some degree be experienced with the conditions.

"The opening match of the campaign against Saudi Arabia will be crucial."

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Matildas optimistic ahead of Asian Cup

The Matildas have been drawn into Group B for the AFC Women's Asian Cup 2008 alongside Japan, Korea Republic and Chinese Taipei at the recent official draw ceremony.

Matildas head coach Tom Sermanni was optimistic about his team's chances following the announcement.

"I think we are placed in the more challenging of the two groups, but we

have experience against each of our opponents in recent years so it won't be as daunting as our first AFC Asian Cup appearance," said Sermanni.

"Although there is no qualification for the FIFA Women's World Cup up for grabs at this tournament, it is important that we finish with a high placing to make sure we are seeded for the next round of qualifiers in 2010.

"We definitely want to build on the momentum that we had at last year's FIFA Women's World Cup and continue improving the performance of our national team on the world stage," concluded Sermanni.

The eight nation tournament will be held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam from May 28 to June 8, 2008, with matches played at the Thong Nhat Stadium and the Army Stadium.

The Matildas were the second seeds for the tournament behind China, the reigning Asian champions.

Australia will open their AFC Women's Asian Cup 2008 campaign against Chinese Taipei on Thursday May 29, followed by the match against Korea Republic on Saturday May 31, before the final group match against Japan on Monday June 2.

The top two teams in each group will progress to the semi-finals and meet the top two teams of Group A which features China, DPR Korea, Vietnam and Thailand.

The Matildas are currently placed 12th in the FIFA rankings. DPR Korea is currently the top ranked Asian nation at 6th, with Japan ranked at 10th and China at 14th.

This will be Australia's second appearance at Asia's premier women's football competition. The Matildas were runners-up at the 2006 AFC Women's Asian Cup after losing the final on penalties to China.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP 2008 DRAW

THURSDAY MAY 29, 2008
Australia vs Chinese Taipei

SATURDAY MAY 31, 2008
Australia vs Korea Republic

MONDAY JUNE 2, 2008
Australia vs Japan

FOOTBALL SPREADS ITS REACH

Football Federation Australia recently announced the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup draw, making clear its intention to reach as many fans as possible.

Bunbury (WA), Caloundra (QLD), Cessnock (NSW), Mandurah (WA) and Mount Gambier (SA) will all host matches for the first time, while Launceston (TAS), Campbelltown (NSW), Port Macquarie (NSW) and Wollongong (NSW) will again welcome Hyundai A-League clubs for the annual pre-season tournament.

The format of the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup involves two groups of four teams (Group A: Adelaide United, Melbourne Victory, Perth Glory, Newcastle Jets; Group B: Sydney FC, Queensland Roar, Wellington Phoenix, Central Coast Mariners) with each team to play the other teams in their group once.

The top teams from each group after the three rounds progress to the final on Wednesday August 6, with the winner presented the Hyundai A-League 2008 Pre-Season Cup.

Adelaide United are the defending Hyundai A-League Pre-Season Cup champions and are aiming for their third straight pre-season title. The first round of the 2008 pre-season will kick-off on Saturday July 19 with Sydney FC hosting Queensland Roar at Campbelltown Stadium in Sydney's south west and later that evening Perth Glory host the Newcastle Jets at Mandurah. The following day will see Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United meet in what is turning out to be their traditional match at Aurora Stadium in Launceston, Tasmania and the Central Coast will travel to New Zealand to face the Phoenix.

The Hyundai A-League 2008/09 season proper will commence on Friday August 15, 2008.

FFA and Hyundai continue partnership

Football Federation Australia and Hyundai Motor Company Australia recently announced that the car manufacturer's successful naming rights partnership of the Hyundai A-League will continue for an additional four years to the end of the 2011/2012 season.

"We are delighted to announce that our partnership with our very good friends at Hyundai has been extended for an additional four seasons," said FFA chief executive Ben Buckley.

"Hyundai was the first major partner to take the leap of faith and invest in the A-League before anyone knew what to expect from the new competition.

"Their faith and support has seen the partnership develop a sporting product that has captured the attention of fans not just in Australia, but around the world.

"The Hyundai A-League is now an established part of the Australian sporting landscape and we have Steve Yeo and his team at the Hyundai Motor Company Australia to thank for this success," concluded Buckley.

Hyundai Motor Company Australia CEO Steve Yeo was equally proud to announce an extension of the partnership.

"Our team at Hyundai Motor Company Australia and our national dealer network look forward to building an even stronger working partnership with the FFA and the broader Australian football community.

"As the founding sponsor of the Hyundai A-League, our partnership with football in Australia has witnessed many changes including an increase in registrations, TV audience viewing numbers as well as crowd attendance at Hyundai A-League matches. Together we look forward to continue our important role in the further development of football in Australia.

"Globally, Hyundai is mid-way through a 14-year partnership with FIFA and our position as founding naming rights partner of the Hyundai A-League is an important part of this worldwide football support network by the Hyundai brand, " concluded Yeo.

Hyundai was the first partner of the competition, which was announced on November 1, 2004, with a four year agreement as the naming rights partner.

Hyundai's partnership with football in Australia extends across the sport from the "Goals for Grassroots" community program through to the support of the Qantas Socceroos and Matildas.

The recent partnership announcement also coincided with the official release of the Hyundai A-League 2008/09 season draw, which kicks off on Friday August 15, and concludes with the first Saturday night Hyundai A-League Grand Final in the history of the competition.

TOGETHER WE'LL LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

No matter how little a child has, if they have their health, they have a shot at a future. Which is why UNICEF Australia and Football Federation Australia are teaming up to create crucial sports-based community programs for underprivileged children whose lives are at risk from poverty, disease and violence in places such as Papua New Guinea, Iraq and even parts of Australia. And now we're asking you to join the team.

Please donate whatever you can at www.unicef.org.au

unicef | FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

YOUNGSTERS READY TO FIRE

The Qantas Young Socceroos have drawn Jordan, Thailand and Uzbekistan in Group D of the AFC Under 19 Asian Championship to be held in Saudi Arabia later this year.

The top two teams in the group will progress to the quarter-finals and meet those teams who progress from Group C which contains DPR Korea, China, Tajikistan and Lebanon. Groups A and B contain the likes of South Korea, Iraq, Japan, Iran and host-nation Saudi Arabia.

The four semi-finalists of the AFC Under 19 Asian Championship will represent Asia at the FIFA Under 20 World Cup in Egypt next year.

The Qantas Young Socceroos commenced their road to the FIFA U20 World Cup after progressing past the first stage of qualification last November.

A number of Hyundai A-League players have already featured in the campaign to date including recently capped Qantas Socceroo James Holland and Newcastle Jets team-mate Jason Hoffman, Queensland Roar attacking pair Tahj Minniecon and Mitch Nichols, Central Coast Mariners goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne plus Melbourne Victory duo defender Sebastian Ryall and attacker Nathan Elasi.

Australian's three Group D matches will be played at the Prince Saudi Bin Jalawi Stadium in Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia, from November 1 to 5 later this year..

AFC U19 ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP DRAW:

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 1
Australia vs Thailand

MONDAY NOVEMBER 3
Australia vs Uzbekistan

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 5
Australia vs Jordan

AUSSIE FOOTBALL TEAMS UP WITH UNICEF

Football Federation Australia and UNICEF Australia have announced their new partnership to benefit vulnerable children in Australia and Asia.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, is the leading, effective global organisation working on development and emergency relief around the world. Achieving results for over 60 years, UNICEF helps children to survive and thrive by providing communities with essential medicines, vaccines, educational, and emergency supplies.

The FFA joins a prestigious group of global football bodies, clubs and players partnering with UNICEF.

The partnership follows in the footsteps of FIFA's support for UNICEF through the FIFA World Cup and FIFA Women's World Cup, UNICEF's partnerships with Barcelona FC, Manchester United and Real Madrid, and support by UNICEF Ambassadors such as David Beckham and Harry Kewell.

Ben Buckley, chief executive of the FFA, said all the staff and players are thrilled to partner with UNICEF.

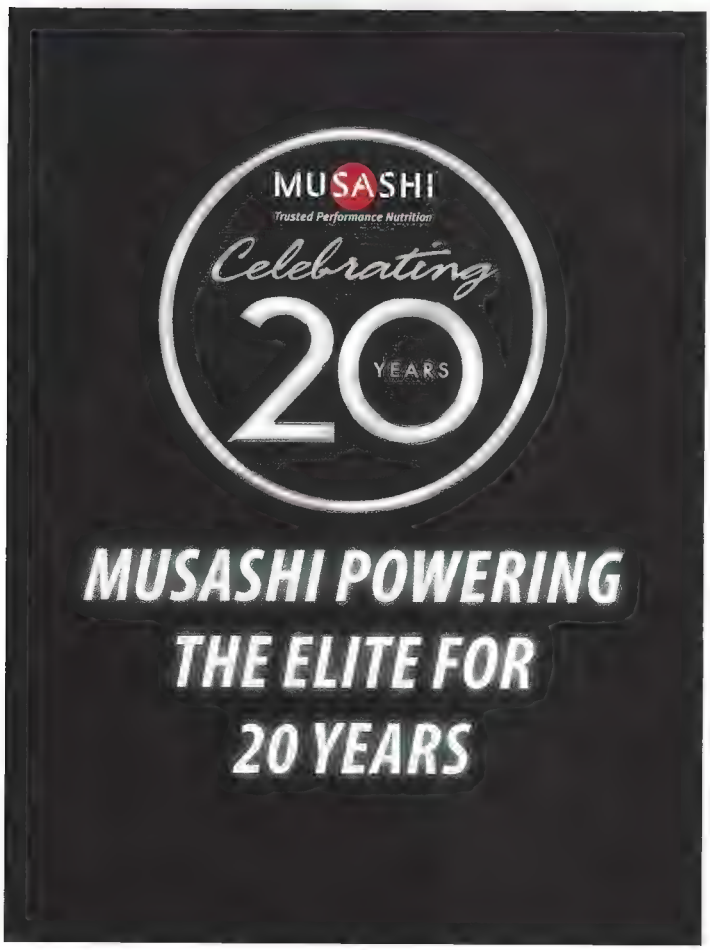
"Football has the power to unite children all over the world. Football in Australia is going through a growth period and what better way to take advantage of this than to join the global football community in its partnership with UNICEF to help millions of vulnerable children."

Initially, the FFA partnership will support UNICEF community development programs for children in Papua New Guinea, Iraq and Indigenous communities within Australia.

"Sport and play are important to UNICEF because they are vital elements in the health, happiness and well-being of children and young people," said UNICEF chief executive Carolyn Hardy.

"UNICEF achieves results and together with the FFA, we will use sport-based programs to deliver important messages about child health and well-being, improve children's lives and strengthen communities. Outreach to FFA supporters in Australia will provide vital funds for these programs."

The partnership for children is being promoted extensively at the upcoming FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Australia and overseas through matchday announcements, advertisements featuring Qantas Socceroo ambassadors, and promotion to FFA supporters.



YOUNG MATILDAS TOPPLE KIWIS

The under-20 national women's team, the Young Matildas, completed their recent training camp in Canberra with a 4-2 win over the New Zealand Under 17 team.

After conceding a goal in the second minute, the Australians went into halftime with a 3-1 lead thanks to two goals from Kyah Simon [*right*] and a long-range strike by Teresa Polias.

Substitute Nicola Bolger came on in the 68th minute and three minutes later she slotted home the fourth for the home side.

New Zealand then struck a late goal to leave the match at 4-2.

The squad, coached by Alen Stajcic, is in the early stages of preparation for their 2010 Women's World Youth Cup campaign while the Kiwis will host the FIFA U17 Women's World Cup later this year.

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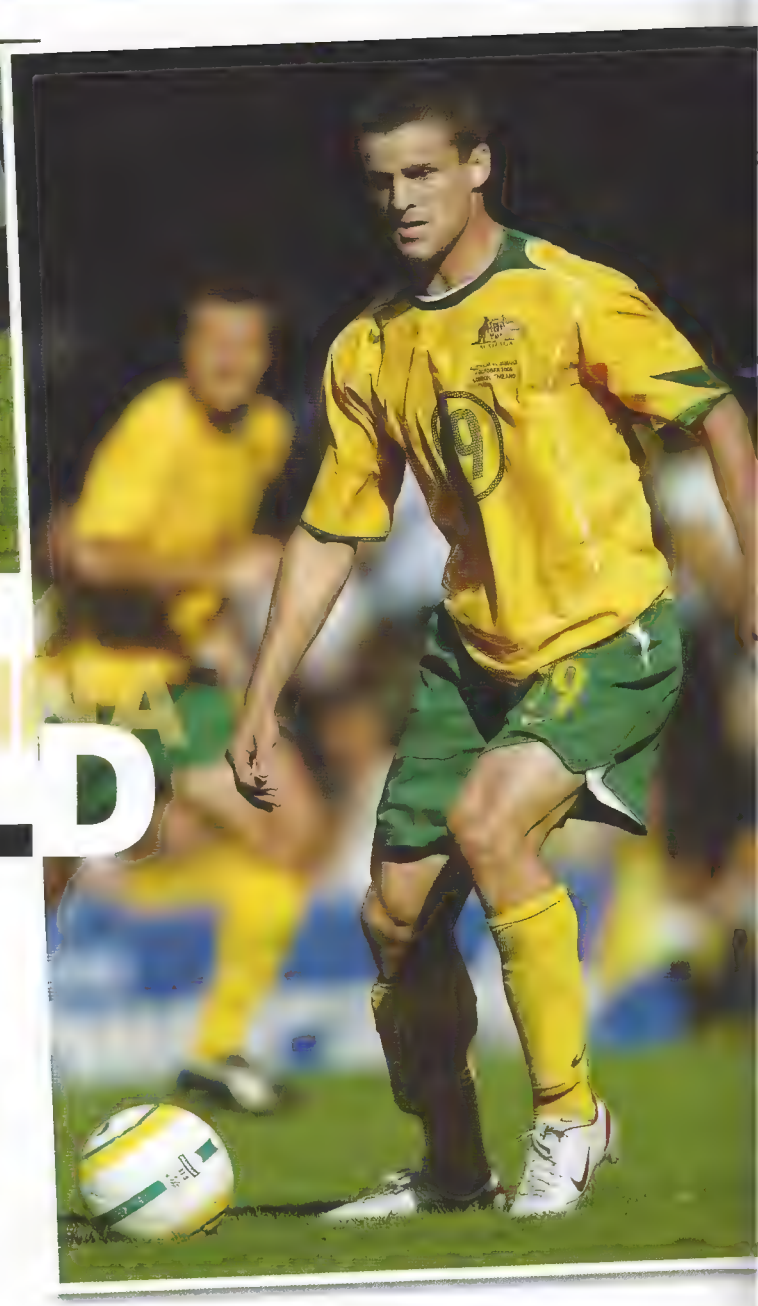


MIDFIELD HEART

Jason Culina talks about his role in midfield for Australia, family life, his future plans and more

Since your debut in 2005, how has your role for Australia changed?
I've played a few different roles but they're all very much the same. Basically if you're playing in midfield you've got certain criteria that you have to meet. All coaches ask you to do pretty much the same thing. I prefer a left or a right midfield role. I've been asked in the past to play more a defensive central role, but like I said before, in midfield if you follow those certain criteria, it's all pretty much the same.

Can you explain your move from the flanks to the centre?
Yeah, I think the coaches have seen that I've matured and probably can play that central role. I like to think I have also. Playing on the flanks is a completely different role to playing in the middle. There's more responsibility, you get involved in the game a lot more, which I like. There's nothing better than touching the ball in the game and from midfield you do that. You receive the ball from defenders, play the ball forward to the strikers, you're always involved and in enjoy playing that way.

Has there been any difference in approach between Guus Hiddink, Graham Arnold and Pim Verbeek?
No, because they've all got the same philosophy. There have been little subtle changes but nothing drastic. We're all professionals, we've been playing in Europe for a long time. There's the basic things you've got to know in football. I like to think I know those things, that's why I'm playing for my national team. All those things that coaches tell you, whether it's Guus, Graham Arnold or Pim, are pretty much the same. It's just those little subtle things tactically that they seem to think is necessary in those games.

Did Pim given you any specific directions for the China match?
Nah, nothing really specific. He said, "Jason, you're going to play in this different [attacking] role. You've played it before, you know what to do, go out there and do it." We're not in camp long enough to work on tactics and do specific things. Before the Qatar game we were in camp for two days, one and a half days. China was exactly the same. There's not much you can work on. Pim has got to

trust the players usually to go out and do the job, and he does. He's got good faith and good trust in the players to do the job. And whatever he says the players have to listen and try to pick up as much as possible. He's very simple, he just tells us what he wants, tells us – "I believe in you, go out there and do it." Against Qatar I played a more defensive role. Against China I played a more attacking role. I'm familiar with both positions so it wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

What can you remember about playing Paraguay at Suncorp Stadium in 2006?

The crowd was great, I think we had about 45,000 or 50,000. We don't play here too often, so I'm glad we're playing here. It's fantastic for the people in

90 MINUTE MAN

Since playing every minute of Australia's 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign as well as the two matches each against the Solomons and Uruguay to qualify, Culina has been substituted just twice in two years for the Qantas Socceroos. As an intelligent, technical, versatile midfielder with outstanding stamina, Culina guarantees 90 minutes for Pim Verbeek across a variety of roles. As a result, he is one of the first players written on the team sheet. Interestingly though, at PSV he is used differently. In the Dutch league for PSV this season, he played half of his 18 matches off the bench. In those nine he started, he was substituted in every one.

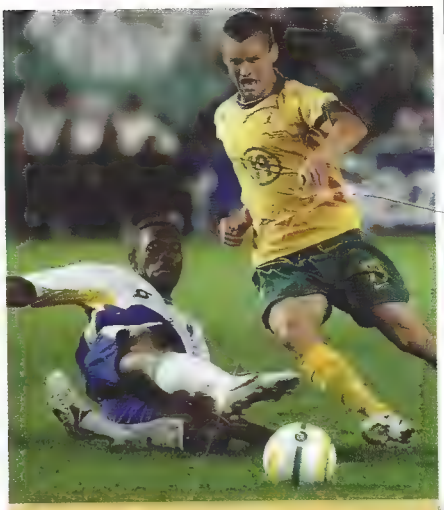
Queensland. We're all looking forward to it and it is a nice stadium. I think I played there once before for Sydney United before it got re-developed. I think I may have played there in the old NSL.

Remembering the China qualifier in March, what were you thinking when China got the penalty?
What the hell was Schwarzer doing?! [*laughs*] Why did he have to go and trip the guy over! Nah... it was a little frustrating. You put a lot of hard work into a game and in the last minute you concede a penalty. Actually I can tell you it's very frustrating. But there was always that little bit of confidence that Schwarzy would save the penalty and he did, so there was nothing to worry about in the end.

No déjà vu from that Italy match?
Nah, that's in the past. You don't think about the past, you think about the future. I was confident that Schwarzy would save the penalty and he did. You've got to have belief in your keeper as much as he believes in the players. As soon as the guy took the spot kick you could see Schwarzy was going to save it.

How are you finding Australia's move into Asia?
The Asian move has got its positives, it's got its negatives. In Asia, there are a lot more games involved. You've got more chances, you can afford to lose points here and there. You've got the opportunity of winning more games. When we went through the South American part, it was do or die for those two games, but in saying that we were well aware of all the Uruguayan players. We played against them week-in, week-out in Europe. We were aware of the conditions, we were aware of the atmosphere, we were aware of a lot more. Whereas Asia, it's pretty unknown, we don't know the players, we don't know the teams, but like I said before, you can afford to lose points here and there and not be affected by it as much.

"[Iraq] were too good for us, simple as that. We weren't fit enough, we weren't ready enough. Simple as that, we weren't good enough"



GOAL HUNTING

In Culina's breakthrough season in 2004/5 with FC Twente in Holland, he scored 11 goals in just 32 league matches. Before then, he had scored just four senior league goals and since then, he has scored just three, including just two for PSV in 69 matches. For Australia, his only goal came in a 7-0 drubbing of the Solomon Islands in the first leg of Australia's last ever tie in Oceania. If Culina can discover his shooting boots in the Green and Gold, he will become our stand-out midfielder.

What do you remember of the match against Iraq in the AFC Asian Cup?
They were too good for us, simple as that. We weren't fit enough, we weren't ready enough. Simple as that, we weren't good enough. So we're looking to change that. The boys are fitter now hopefully, we're all just coming off our seasons. We're looking for revenge but we know it's going to be a big test. We know that we almost need these next six points to guarantee us going through to the next phase. We're working as hard as we can now towards those games.

This season you helped win PSV Eindhoven's fourth Dutch title in a row, and your third as a player...
Yes, it's getting a bit boring now you know! When you've won three in a row you start to think you need a new challenge!

As a former Ajax Amsterdam player, do you take satisfaction from seeing them not perform?
Yes definitely! I hate Ajax now! I love it when they lose. They're overconfident and they're too arrogant. I love watching them lose.

What do you make of Ajax's recent struggles?
Every big team in the world has a dip. You can't stay up the top for too long. Yes, PSV's done it for the last four or five years, but before then it was Ajax. Every team you look at, Real Madrid for three or four years there, they had all the best players playing in their team but they couldn't win anything. Now they're just starting to come back in the last two years. Every team has its cycle. It's impossible to stay at the top forever. All the fans demand it but its not always possible. Yeah, it's frustrating for teams like Ajax, they're a massive club. They are the biggest club in Holland. Next year they're getting Marco van Basten in to coach and I'm sure he'll change things around. Hopefully they can be a top team again. But at the moment it's PSV.

What's a typical week for you at home in Holland?
It depends what season it is. I'll go to training, be home by 1:00, 1:30pm. In the winter time, normally it's stay at home, have lunch with my wife and my son. Then you might go to the shops, have a walk around. Go for a coffee somewhere. Whereas in the summer, it's come home around the same time. We'll go down to the park, play with my son, let him run around a little bit: more outdoor activities. Meet up with a friend or two. I always find the end of the season the best time. You can relax a bit more, it's getting warmer, you're enjoying your football because the weather's nicer. You can be outdoors a lot more. A basic week is come home, have lunch, relax with the family and on the odd occasion go to the shops or visit friends and that's it really. It's nothing too flash, it's nothing like what people probably think, that we have these big exciting lives. If you ask me it's boring! But having a family and a young son definitely lightens things up.

"I don't get to see [my family] often, so spending time with Mum, Dad, and my brother, his family and my wife's family, is most important to me"

You've been in Holland for almost 10 years now. Have you made a connection to the place?
Yeah, it's been a long time. I think there's that little bit of attachment to Holland. It's special. My son was born there. You've seen the country. Maybe down the track in 10, 15 years time when we've had a couple of kids we can take them back for holidays and show them where we lived and tell them all about our experiences. There's always a connection with each country. I don't want to take too much away from Holland but I am Aussie - I'm half Aussie, half Croatian, my parents come from Croatia so quite often I go to Croatia with my parents. I'll never feel Dutch. My wife can speak it, I can speak it. There is that little connection, but in saying that, we're Aussies and Australia is our home. Maybe one day when we go back for holidays I can show my son where he was born and so forth.

Do you ever catch up with some of the other Aussies in Holland?
Luke [Wilkshire] no, he's about two hours drive away. It's a bit of a hike. But yes, Brett Holman, he's only half an hour

away, which I didn't realise until about three or four months ago! He has come over to my place once or twice, and we stay in contact. But yeah, not too often. We've got so many games. We get sick of football sometimes and you just want to do other things.

You've got one more year of your PSV contract. Any thoughts on the future?
Nah, just to enjoy my holidays right now, concentrate on playing for Australia. I've learned in football whatever happens, happens. You just need to do your best, enjoy yourself and things will get decided that way.

A new PSV coach is coming in...
Yeah, Huub Stevens. He's coaching Hamburg at the moment [in Germany]. He's a Dutch man who's been in Germany for quite a while and apparently he's very tough. I'm really looking forward to it, all the hard training! [*laughs*]

You haven't played as many games this season as previous seasons...
Nah, I missed two months with an injury, so I missed about 10 games there. Then I had an injury at the end of the season, so I missed a few games there. A new coach came in, favoured a couple of the other players for a little while, and then realised at the end that I should have been playing! I proved that I should have been playing. It's frustrating, different coaches have different ideas. When you have three different coaches in one year, every coach has a different idea. Two of them, [Ronald] Koeman and [Jan] Wouters, under them I always played. Then this new guy [Sef Vergoossen] came along, had different ideas, I had a bit of an injury here and there, so I was in limited games. But, yeah, it doesn't really matter. That's all part of the experience, as long as you finish on top in the end, you'll prove to the coach that he should have been playing you from the start. That's what satisfies you the most.

You were quoted a couple of years ago as saying that the Aussies in England get all the local media attention. What did you mean by that?
I was being a bit sarcastic. Some people probably took it the wrong way but I was just being a bit sarcastic. But yeah, it's normal, it's true, the Premier League is the biggest league in the world, it's as simple as that. Everybody wants to be playing there. You know, it's shown all over the world. As much as people, and as much as I, think that PSV is one of the best teams in Europe, other people obviously see it differently. I was just being a bit sarcastic by saying, "Yeah, maybe I should go to the Premier League because then I'll get noticed a bit more." But that's just reality, the Premier League's the biggest, and the players playing there get noticed a lot more. That's all I meant by it.

How will you be spending your time in Australia this off-season?
Family is most important to me, so spending as much time as possible with my family. I don't get to see them very often, so spending time with Mum, Dad, and my brother, his family and my wife's family, is most important to me. That's all I'll do, all day, every day.

WHERE PSV STAND

Culina is quick to rate his employers as one of the best teams in Europe. Although PSV are the dominant force in Holland, the Dutch league is probably only the sixth richest league in Europe. PSV appears on neither the revenue-based Deloitte Football Money League top 20 nor the Forbes top 25 richest football clubs list, although Dutch rivals Ajax appear 19th on the latter list. However, PSV punch above their weight in terms of European performance: they are one of the few clubs to have won both the European Cup and the UEFA Cup in their history. In Culina's time at the club, PSV were knocked out of the Champions League at the final 16 stage in 2005/6, the final eight stage in 2006/7 but were knocked out in only the first group stage this season, and relegated to the UEFA Cup.

OUR GREATEST DEFENDERS

We examine the debate surrounding who is the finest defender Australia has produced

By Jack Snape

Australia boasts a fine history of elite defenders. From the work down the flanks by Joe Marston for Preston in the 1950s, through the legendary team that made it to the 1974 FIFA World Cup, and right up to the current generation led by supreme professional Lucas Neill, Australia has been blessed with tough, smart, determined and often skilful defensive leaders. But just who is the very best, and can you even say?

World Cup warriors

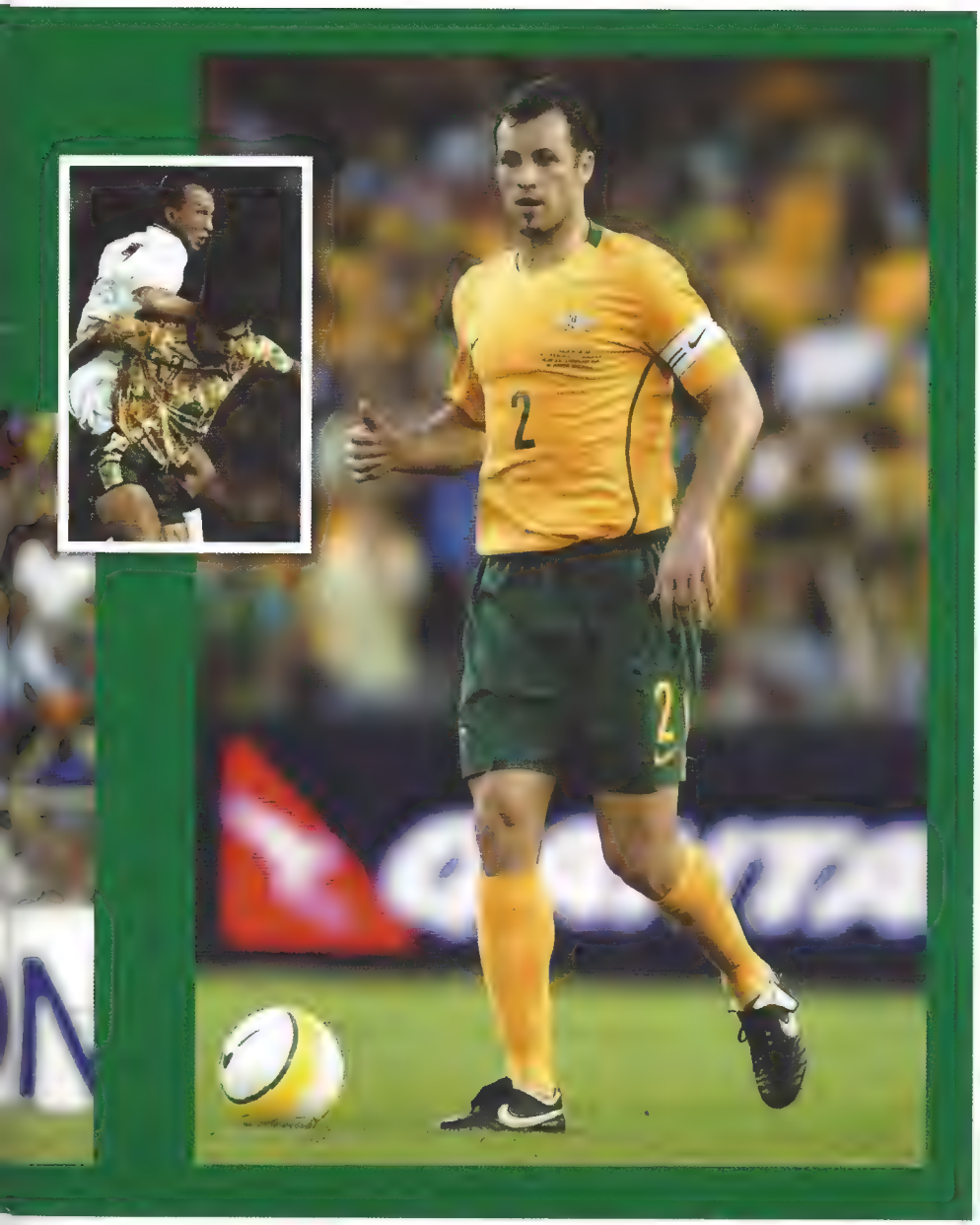
The Qantas Socceroos who valiantly qualified for the 2006 FIFA World Cup were led by their defenders. Lucas Neill, Tony Popovic and Craig Moore were senior members of the side which made it to the final 16. Tony Vidmar, too, was influential in the side's qualification.

In terms of international competition, never before had the Qantas Socceroos achieved so much success: this was our finest hour.

Australia's national goalkeeping coach and former international Tony Franken regards the 2006 generation of defenders highly.

"I think we had a golden generation when we were at the FIFA World Cup. From the [fourth place finish at the] Barcelona Olympics, a lot of them were involved from that era."

In addition to Australia's top 16 performance and words of men like Franken, the claims of these men to the mantle of our finest defenders is supported by the growing popularity of the game in Australia. In 2006, the



JIM FRASER'S BEST

"Doug Utjesenovic was a superstar. He played probably the best game I've ever seen anyone play for Australia ever. Against Iran in Iran [in 1973] we were down 2-0 after 20 minutes but held on to win on aggregate. He was absolutely superb that night. I got a lot of credit, but he destroyed them. He was just everywhere. He was winning balls in the air, and his combination with Peter Wilson and myself... I'd go for Dougie."

nation stopped to watch each FIFA World Cup match, cheer each tackle and deride each opposition striker. Ask a person on the street who the greatest ever Australian defender is, a player from 2006 would more than likely be named.

In years past though, even at the 1974 FIFA World Cup, the team received far less publicity.

Alex Tobin, international appearance record-holder for Australia and himself a candidate for our greatest defender, had little knowledge of his predecessors from the 1970s.

"I think my education of defenders who came before me wasn't as good as it should have been," he says. "The coverage wasn't good."

Before the 2006 group had ever pulled on a pair of boots, the Australian team that made the 1974 FIFA World Cup had already been written into folklore. The side included legendary defenders such as Peter Wilson, Manfred Schaefer and Doug Utjesenovic.

While this side enjoys a mythical status, very few people ever saw, let alone remember, their defence in action. The limited exposure that team enjoyed compared to the current players has prevented the football public from fully grasping their quality, and not allowed fans to fairly compare them to their successors. While they must have been good, just how good were they?

Woah to pro

Any comparison between football of 1974 and football of 2006 will be fraught with difficulty. The Qantas Socceroos of the 1970s played in a different era. These men were not full-time professionals, and the game they played reflected that.

The keeper that got Australia to the 1974 finals, Jim Fraser, works now as a goalkeeping coach for Sydney FC and at his own Sydney academy. He knows better than anyone the changing nature of football.

"The game's a lot faster now from when we played," he says. "Players are a lot fitter, and their skill level's gone up because they've got to make more decisions and they've got to make those decisions quicker."

Another international of the 1970s who has turned to coaching, currently for Sydney FC, is John Kosmina.

"You can't really compare those [1970s] guys. I think in a similar environment to what the players have come through these days, I think they would have stood up on their own. But you just can't compare. The game was different, the circumstances were different, everything was different."

Nonetheless, Fraser agrees that the natural skill level of his contemporaries, and one in particular, ensures a favourable comparison of these sideburn-endowed legends with any modern day footballer.

"I think those guys, with the same training, would have made the transformation and they would have been up there today, especially Dougie [Utjesenovic]," says Fraser.

"Dougie was very elegant, a great kicker of dead balls. He was one of those

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players who could play as sweeper, or you could play him in midfield. As a right-back, he was superb because he was probably one of the first players to play that wing-back game where you could get up and down the field and get the crosses across. Those guys would make the transformation [to the modern day] without any problem at all."

The forgotten era

When remembering Australian excellence, the 1974 and 2006 teams stand out for their appearances on football's biggest stage, although there were many fine defenders who donned the Green and Gold but never made it to a FIFA World Cup finals tournament.

The period in between our two successful FIFA World Cup qualification runs saw the emergence of many fine defenders. Yet each team was often the victim of the cruel Oceania play-off qualification system, undermining those players' claims to greatness.

"I think they did it tough, and they had a lot of bad luck along the way," reckons Fraser. "There were times where we missed out, like the time we missed out against Scotland. For those reasons they didn't reach the pinnacle, but there were a lot of great individuals in those teams."

Tobin and Kosmina were both prominent players in our FIFA World Cup hiatus that spanned the late 1970s to the early 2000s. They are adamant that some of their peers were elite defenders.

"I played alongside Milan Ivanovic [*above*] for a long time, who I certainly rated as one of the best," remembers Tobin. "No one doubted he could play with the ball, but when a purely defensive job had to be done, he could do it too. He was very good in the air, he was very good in the tackle. And when it came to playing and getting forward with the ball as well, he was very composed and very well balanced.

"Paul Okon, he was a little bit different. He played alongside me as a sweeper but he spent a lot of time in midfield, as did Ned Zelic. He was a defender, but he played so much as a defensive holding midfielder. They would be regarded as two of our better ones as well."

In contrast to Tobin, John Kosmina remembers the toughness of his team-mates.

"Dave Ratcliffe was a steel fixer and he still is. He was tough. Steve O'Connor and Tony Henderson were hard as well and they were characters. Col Bennett was the other guy, probably not as technically gifted, but you couldn't go past him."

Finding one

With such a diverse smattering of players and eras, the argument about the greatest Aussie defender will long be a fierce and complicated one. What is clear however is that young defenders today have every opportunity to become great. Men such as Jade North, Michael Beauchamp, Mark Milligan and Matthew Spiranovic represent a promising next generation. Yet, with the retirement of the likes of Moore, Popovic and Vidmar, the future retains some uncertainty.

"I think it's a transition period and hopefully a number of these Olyroos and Young Socceroos will take that step forward," believes Franken. "Matthew Spiranovic who's playing at Nurnberg, these sorts of players, you're hoping that they will take a step forward in years to come. Lucas Neill is obviously an established defender and will be for years to come, but we need to look at these younger defenders and hopefully they take the step up."

Tonight some of these players get their chance. The match against Iraq at Suncorp Stadium on June 1, 2008 may just be the start of a new legend for Australian defenders.

JOHN KOSMINA'S CHOICE

"Willy [Peter Wilson] probably for his character and his leadership skills. He was different. He was a great bloke, someone not to be messed around with. He was tough and uncompromising on the field. So were the other blokes, but he had an aura about him."

TONY FRANKEN'S PICK

"I would say, and he's just retired [from the Qantas Socceroos] in the game against Qatar, Craig Moore. Someone who graduated from the Institute of Sport at a young age, went to England, confirmed himself at Glasgow Rangers over 10 years, was captain at Glasgow Rangers, played Champions League football, captained Australia. I think, for me, he was the modern day defender who was extremely quick, read the game, was extremely tough and very good on the ball. For me, he would arguably be the best defender we've produced."

"Lucas Neill is obviously an established defender and will be for years to come, but we need to look at these younger defenders"

IRAQ

Green machine

Flying the flag for a divided nation

Iraq produces splendid footballers and resilient teams. Never underestimate the Asian champs who just roll with the punches

By Aidan Ormond

This time last year in the lead up to the AFC Asian Cup, Iraq had been written off by football's punditry. The big four – Australia, Saudi Arabia, Japan and South Korea – were the focal point of the buzz before the tournament kicked off.

Even a knock-out stage finish was considered beyond Iraq – and to be fair, you can understand the pessimism. After all, Iraq had endured a disjointed lead in, with a disparate playing squad spread across Asia.

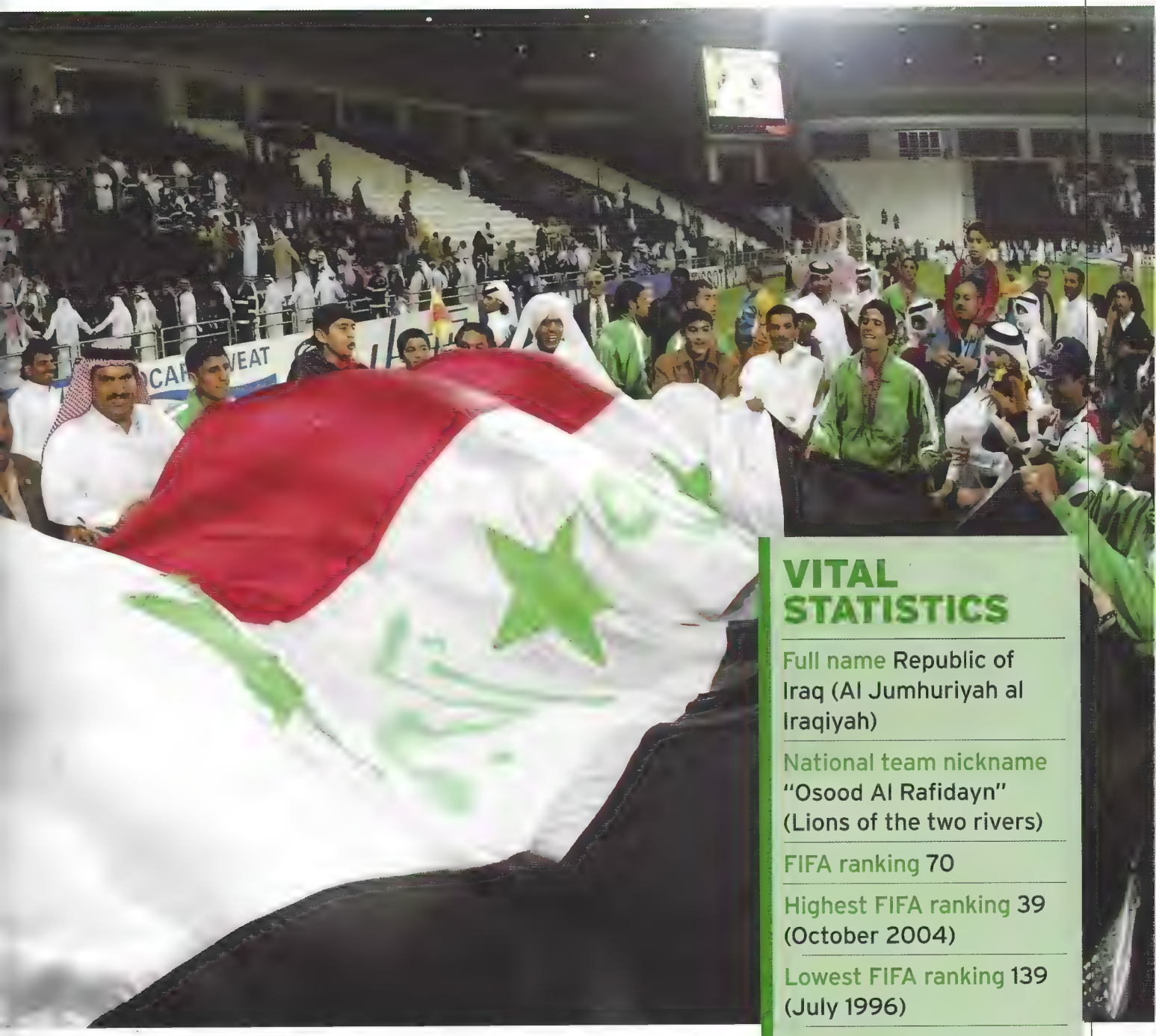
Money was tight and there were concerns over team unity and form after a less than impressive Gulf Cup six months earlier. What's more, they were drawn in a tricky group that included pre-tournament favourites Australia, hosts Thailand and dark horses Oman.

Oh, and they sacked their coach, and the new man Jorvan Vieira wasn't installed into the decidedly hot seat until a month before the tournament began.

If you fancied a flutter, your money wouldn't have been on the battlers in white and green.

Well, one of the big four did make the final, but the fact that Iraq deservedly won the tournament says three things. One: Don't listen to the so-called experts; two: Despite everything that's happened in the country, Iraq possesses a genuine, dead-set football culture; and three: The country has five players good enough for any AFC nation's first XI.

That said, Iraq come to Brisbane today in desperate need to regain their Midas touch after a below par start to their



FIFA 2008 World Cup campaign.

A 0-0 draw with China and the "Disaster in Doha" as their papers put it, after a 2-0 loss to Qatar, have raised questions about Iraq's ability to finish in the top two of this group, and advance to AFC's final group qualification stage.

As inspirational skipper Younis Mahmoud, who'd carried an injury into the Doha game, said after the defeat, "The loss was very sad, as the Iraqi national team hasn't seen sadness for a long time. Small mistakes in the Qatar match cost us the game, this loss however will not stop our dream."

Certainly, the loss of Nashat Akram to injury didn't help their rhythm in the middle of the park. What's more, splitting with Norwegian boss Egil Olsen after just five months in charge was a destabilising change on the eve of the campaign.

But if there is a side that thrives on chaos and instability, it's the boys in green and white. And with avuncular Adnan Hamad back for his fifth stint as Iraq national coach, he might just be the man to put the smiles back on Iraq's faces in Brisbane tonight.

Mexican wave

If Iraq do qualify for the FIFA World Cup, it will bring back memories of 1986. The

VITAL STATISTICS

Full name Republic of Iraq (Al Jumhuriyah al Iraqiyah)

National team nickname "Osood Al Rafidayn" (Lions of the two rivers)

FIFA ranking 70

Highest FIFA ranking 39 (October 2004)

Lowest FIFA ranking 139 (July 1996)

AFC ranking 7

Home stadium Iraq play outside the country for security reasons

Capital Baghdad

Population 29 million (estimated)

Monetary unit Dinar

Economy Oil exporter

Iraq (in blue) in action at the 1986 FIFA World Cup

IRAQ'S ROMARIO

Emmanuel "Ammo" Baba was the scorer of Iraq's first ever international goal in 1956. Baba, who was known for his bicycle kicks and goalscorer's instinct, was the leading figure of Iraqi football in the 1950s. He is supposed to have scored 850 goals in his career.

It's been said that English club Notts County may have even been interested in the Iraqi legend.

On a more sombre note is the fact that he was the first Iraqi to be sent off in an international and, when given the captain's armband for the first time, Baba's Iraq were given a 7-1 pummelling by the Turks.

As a coach, Baba was also a success. He lifted the Iraqis to three Gulf Cups and an Asian Games title during a staggering seven separate stints in charge of the national team.

Clearly the green machine doesn't mind recycling their coaches – current manager Adnan Hamad is back for a fifth time in the dugout.

quality – and spirit – that got Iraq to the AFC Asian Cup Final in Jakarta last July was in evidence 22 years ago when Iraq first made a FIFA World Cup finals.

Looking back at that tournament on paper, three losses and last place in their group doesn't make for good reading. Delve deeper however and you'll appreciate that the Iraqis were not outclassed in a very difficult group.

The roots of Iraq's 2007 success could be traced back to the Athens Olympics three years earlier

Starting with a loss against Paraguay, the 1-0 score effectively ended Iraq's campaign given host nation Mexico and the dangerous Belgium were also in their group. A 1-0 loss to the Mexicans confirmed the early exit but Ahmed Radhi Amaiesh still made history by scoring Iraq's first ever FIFA World Cup finals goal in their 2-1, 10-man loss to the under-rated Belgians – a side that made the semi-finals.

Despite the early exit, the Iraqis had shown they were no bunnies on the biggest stage of all.

Olympics gift

By 2004, a new, talented generation of Iraqi footballers were ready to show the world at the Olympics in Athens what many football fans in Asia already knew.

Iraq's run to the semi-finals was one of the fairytale stories of the 2004 Olympic Games, particularly given their difficult circumstances back home.

They were eventually knocked out by Paraguay 3-1 in the final four and then Italy went on to take the play-off for Bronze 1-0. A disappointing finish, yes. But along the way, Iraq stunned some highly fancied nations.

They got past a strong Australian side 1-0 in the quarter-finals, with Emad Mohammed's 64th minute strike the difference in a brilliant victory.

What's more, in the group stage, the green machine famously stunned Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal 4-2. A Haidar Jabar own goal gave Portugal a 13th-minute lead but Iraq levelled three minutes later through Emad Mohammed.

Hawar Mulla Mohammed put Iraq 2-1 up after 29 minutes before Portugal equalised on the stroke of halftime through the then 21-year-old Jose Bosingwa – a recent $33 million signing for Chelsea. However, second-half goals from Younis Mahmoud and Saleh Sadir gave Iraq a momentous victory.

Tack onto that victory a 2-0 win over Costa Rica – Mahdi Karim and that man

STAR MEN

This fearsome five headlines Iraq's golden generation

NASHAT AKRAM

At 23, we are still to see the best of Nashat.

A real box-to-box midfielder, Nashat ran the show when the Qantas Socceroos were soundly beaten 3-1 in Bangkok a year ago.

He also plays in the Qatari league alongside Younis Mahmoud at Al Gharafa, having signed in April.

His FIFA World Cup campaign so far has been blighted by injury – he didn't play against Qatar – and a red card against China.

Like Younis he too has his own website: www.nashatakram.net

YOUNIS MAHMOUD

A superstar in the eyes of Iraq's footy-loving public back home and abroad, Mahmoud is a popular captain of the national team and has proved to be a strong leader [*pictured on page 33 holding trophy*].

At club level, the Al Gharafa striker has been in royal form with the Qatari champions. He's going close to scoring a goal a game – 44 goals in 55 appearances – with the club.

He hit the big time in 2003 when he led all Asian players with seven goals in the first round of qualification for the 2004 AFC Asian Cup.

Younis likes to donate some of his earnings to Iraqi charities, was equal top-scorer at last year's AFC Asian Cup and even has his own website: www.younismahmoud.com

HAWAR MULLA MOHAMMED

One of AFC's most menacing attacking midfielders, the Kurdish-born star is hitting the best years of his career and is a vital cog in the Iraqi midfield.

Also 25, he's proved his worth with 15 goals in 61 appearances for Iraq – and has the knack of scoring when it's needed most.

EMAD MOHAMMED

The 26-year-old has been a fixture in the national team with 67 appearances and 21 goals.

Arguably the finest striker of the modern Iraqi generation, Mohammed was awarded young player of the year and Iraqi striker of the year in 2000.

MAHDI KARIM

The 24-year-old wing-back is yet another quality attacking option for coach Adnan Hamad.

With Karim on one side and Hawar Mulla Mohammed on the other, Iraq's midfield has pace and power.

And Karim is famous for scoring a "Beckham" style goal – a long range effort against Jordan in a 2005 friendly.

again Hawar Mulla Mohammed on the scoresheet for Iraq – and it proved Iraq could beat any opponent.

Sure, no medals for Iraq but a shiny gold star for being one of the feel-good stories of the tournament.

One night in Bangkok

While Iraq's performance in Athens was a superb achievement, it was bettered last year by a glorious AFC Asian Cup journey that took them past three of the favourites all the way to the trophy.

The 3-1 defeat of the Qantas Socceroos was the stand-out victory of their successful group stage, which saw Iraq progress through to the knock-out stages.

Against Australia once again the superb Hawar Mulla Mohammed got on the scoresheet, as did the wily Nashat Akram and the under-rated Karrar Jassim with a late strike.

It earned Iraq the luxury of staying in Bangkok for the quarter-finals. And the advantage showed as they eased past the promising yet youthful Vietnamese 2-0 before a semi-final showdown with Pim Verbeek's South Korea.

A gruelling game ended 0-0 in Kuala Lumpur before Iraq held their nerve to win 4-3 on spot kicks. Iraq was in the final, incredibly.

But in its way was Saudi Arabia, the most experienced and successful AFC Asian Cup side of all. The Saudis had won the tournament three times since 1984.

They were also the leading goalscorers in the tournament with the impressive Yasser Al-Qahtani in royal form in front of goal.

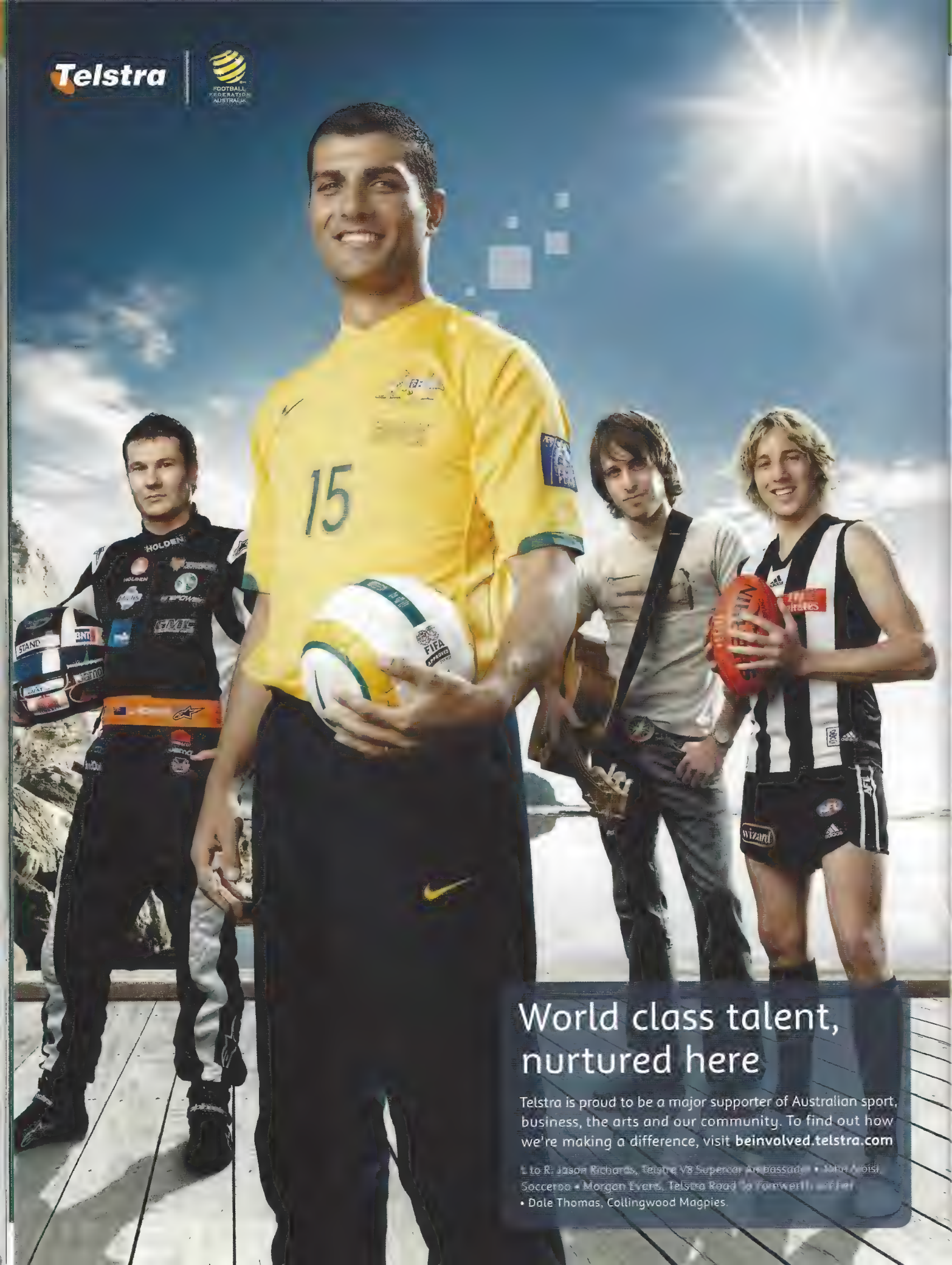
But in a withering contest at Jakarta's Gelora Bung Karno stadium, in front of 60,000 fans, and with Queensland referee Mark Shield in control, it was the instinct of Iraq's talismanic striker Younis Mahmoud that was the difference.

The goal came in the 71st minute. A corner by Hawar Mulla Mohammed was floated high to the far post. Saudi goalkeeper Yasser Al Mosailem came for the ball and flapped at it without making any contact, presenting an easy chance for an unmarked Mahmoud to nod in the winner and wheel away in utter delight.

Iraq's tiring side hung on: 1-0 to Iraq. Their first, and a fully deserved, AFC Asian Cup. To top it off, Younis Mahmoud was voted most valuable player and he was joint tournament top goalscorer with four goals.

The celebrations back in Iraq were muffled due to security concerns, but there was no hiding the pride in their national team.

Tony Popovic in action against Iraq in 2005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One of 2007's great sporting moments

Iraq in Oz...

Between Athens and the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, Iraq's senior team played in Australia in a one-off friendly.

With AFC president Bin Hammam in attendance at Sydney's ANZ stadium, the March 2005 friendly fuelled rumours Australia would soon be accepted into the Asian Football Confederation.

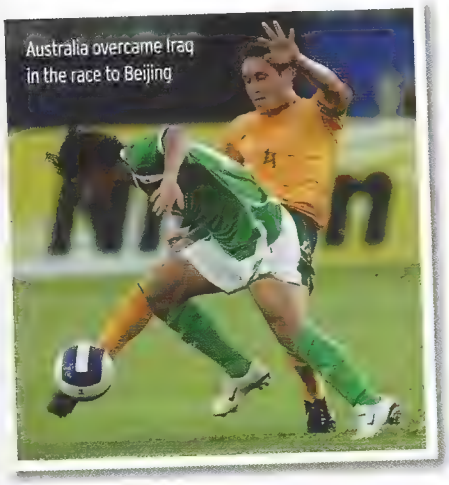
On the park though, and Iraq proved other rumours right: they really could play. The side showed glimpses of the form that would torment the Qantas Socceroos just two years later.

After 11 minutes, Iraq stung the Green and Gold. An innocuous long ball out of defence caught the hosts' defence napping and Mohammed Nasir nipped in between Mark Schwarzer and the back-tracking defenders to calmly lob the big keeper - at the very same end Schwarzer was to become a national hero just eight months later against Uruguay.

The boisterous Iraqi supporters, in good numbers and fine voice in the south-east section of the ground, burst with joy.

It took a goalkeeping blunder by Iraqi keeper Sarmad Rasheed to hand the Aussies an equaliser 10 minutes later after a Mark Bresciano free-kick from 30 metres out slipped underneath his grasp.

With the game seemingly headed for a draw, up popped jack-in-the-box Ahmad Elrich on 72 minutes to latch on to a precise through ball to slide a low shot past Rasheed for the winner.



Australia overcame Iraq in the race to Beijing

Despite the loss, the Iraqis had made their point. Considering the influential Mahmoud wasn't even playing, this was a credible result.

You have to go back to 1973 for a FIFA World Cup qualifier on Aussie soil between the two. Australia defeated Iraq 3-1 at the Sydney Sports Ground. However, the last time an Iraqi team played competitively in Australia was only seven months ago.

The Under 23s played a vital Olympics qualifier at Bluetongue Stadium in Gosford, where a colourful, boisterous 13,000 plus crowd saw Mark Milligan's Australian side triumph 2-0.

If stability can be found at home, Iraq could become an Asian power. In the short term however, it's unclear how the side is dealing with the tag of Asian champions. Certainly their form in 2008 has been nowhere near what we saw a year ago.

And as Australia has found out, expectations can weigh heavy, no matter how talented the individuals.

Nevertheless, what happened in July 2007 should serve as a warning to all in June 2008. Together with the colossal spirit these players derive from representing a troubled country, Iraq will provide a severe test for the unbeaten Qantas Socceroos in this important FIFA World Cup qualifier.

Iraq needs a win tonight. The players know it. Their backs are against the wall... but that's just the way they like it.

IRAQ UNITED

Coach Jorvan Vieira said after the AFC Asian Cup final that coaching this group of players had been a special experience for him.

"I have worked my best to bring a warm smile to their lips and my mission is accomplished. The satisfaction is doubled when you can get this cup and you bring happiness for a country, not just a team.

"Iraqi people, Iraqi players are fantastic people. They are the type of people who have fantastic power within themselves.

"I learned a lot with these boys... and I will keep it forever in my life."

The victory was shared with the nation back home. Sabah Shaiyal, a 43-year-old policeman in Baghdad reportedly said, "The players have made us proud. Once again our national team has shown that there is only one, united Iraq."

AUSTRALIA

GK Ante Covic
GK Adam Federici
GK Michael Petkovic
GK Mark Schwarzer
DF Michael Beauchamp
DF Chris Coyne
DF Brett Emerton
DF Adam Griffiths
DF Mark Milligan
DF Jade North
DF Matthew Spiranovic
DF Nikolai Topor-Stanley
DF Rodrigo Vargas
MF Mark Bresciano
MF Jacob Burns
MF Nick Carle
MF David Carney
MF Jason Culina
MF Vince Grella
MF James Holland
MF Mile Jedinak
MF Mile Sterjovski
MF Carl Valeri
MF Luke Wilkshire
MF Ruben Zadkovich
FW Danny Allsopp
FW Mark Bridge
FW Bruce Djite
FW Joel Griffiths
FW Brett Holman
FW Harry Kewell
FW Scott McDonald
FW Nikita Rukavytsya
FW James Troisi

IRAQ

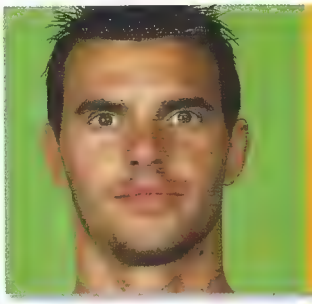
Nour Sabri	GK
Mohammed Kassid	GK
Ahmed Ali	GK
Wisam Kassid	GK
Nabeel Abbas	DF
Yasser Raad	DF
Ali Hussein Rhaima	DF
Haider Abdul Ameer	DF
Salam Shaker	DF
Mohammed Ali Kareem	DF
Saad Atiah	DF
Nashat Akram	MF
Jassim Swadi	MF
Haitham Kadhum	MF
Khaled Basheer	MF
Qusay Munir	MF
Samer Saeed	MF
Hawar Mulla Mohammed	MF
Saleh Sudair	MF
Mahdi Karim	MF
Younis Mahmoud	FW
Emad Mohammed	FW
Alaa Abdul Zahra	FW
Mustafa Kareem	FW
Ali Salah	FW

Meet the Socceroos

These are your Qantas Socceroos, some of whom will face Iraq tonight

AUSTRALIA

GOALKEEPERS



Ante Covic

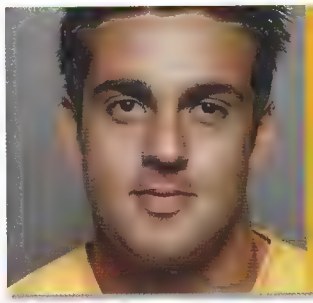
AGE: 32

POSITION: GOALKEEPER

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 2

Ante made his Qantas Socceroos debut Bahrain in February, 2006 with Australia winning 3-1 and also played earlier this year against Singapore. The big keeper was fortunate enough to be third choice at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. A starring role for the Championship-winning Jets in the Hyundai A-League has pushed him back into contention for the number one jersey.



Adam Federici

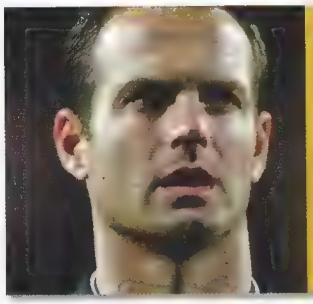
AGE: 23

POSITION: GOALKEEPER

CLUB: READING (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 0

Federici is currently on the books at English Premier League side Reading where he remains second choice, despite some promising performances for the first team in the League and FA Cups. The Nowra-native is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Sport and has already represented Australia at youth level. Regarded as a fine all-round keeper with excellent footwork.



Michael Petkovic

AGE: 31

POSITION: GOALKEEPER

CLUB: SIVASSPOR (TURKEY)

APPEARANCES: 5

After more than 150 appearances with former national league side South Melbourne, Petkovic moved to Turkey in 2002. This season his club finished equal second in the league and qualified for the UEFA Intertoto Cup. They were officially fourth based on head-to-head results. Nonetheless, only Champions Galatasaray conceded fewer goals than Petkovic's side.

Mark Schwarzer

AGE: 35

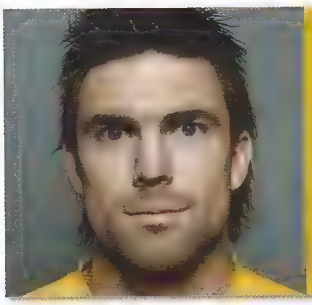
POSITION: GOALKEEPER

CLUB: FULHAM (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 54

Mark's place in Australian footballing history is set thanks to his FIFA World Cup qualifying heroics against Uruguay in 2005. He began his Qantas Socceroos career in similar fashion by starring in a shoot-out victory over Canada during a 1993 FIFA World Cup qualifier in his first senior start. A star in the English Premiership with Middlesbrough, Mark is one of our best-loved stars.

DEFENDER



Michael Beauchamp

AGE: 27

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GER)

APPEARANCES: 13

Michael made his national team debut away to Bahrain in February 2006 in an AFC Asian Cup group qualifier. Since moving to Germany in 2006, he has been a fringe player for Nurnberg but has played more than a dozen games for them this season including three in the UEFA Cup. Playing the whole game, he was a vital performer in holding out China in the 0-0 draw back in March.

Appearance figures correct as of 22/05/08

Chris Coyne

AGE: 29

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: COLCHESTER (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 0

Older brother of Perth Glory full-back Jamie Coyne, Chris has been playing his club football in England for more than a decade. Originally at West Ham, he has bounced around lower leagues before finding form and stability at Luton Town and now Colchester. He has not played representative football since appearing for the Under 17s in 1995.

Brett Emerton

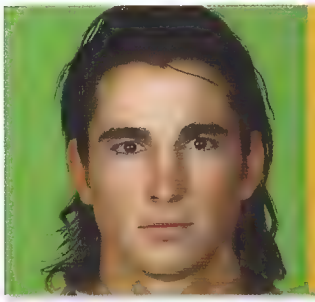
AGE: 28

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: BLACKBURN (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 63

Brett has been a regular Qantas Socceroo since the late '90s when he debuted aged just 18. After captaining Australia at the 2000 Sydney Olympics he moved to Feyenoord then later completed a dream move to the English Premier League and Blackburn Rovers. Brett is one of the best athletes ever to pull on the Green and Gold.



Adam Griffiths

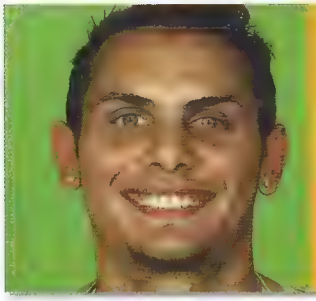
AGE: 28

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 1

After returning last season to Australia and the Hyundai A-League, Adam's form and versatility for high-flying Newcastle has attracted many admirers. Not only can he play in the centre of defence or as a full-back, but the tall, aggressive powerhouse has also played in midfield. He even popped up to score a few goals for the Jets on their way to the Hyundai A-League Championship.



Jade North

AGE: 26

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 17

A mobile and versatile defender, North fits the bill for the modern Qantas Socceroo perfectly. The Newcastle Jets defender has been recognised at national level, having played for our national U17, U20 and U23 sides as well as the senior side over the last eight years. He starred in April's draw with China, keeping the home side's powerful strikers scoreless.

Matthew Spiranovic

AGE: 19

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: FC NURNBERG (GER)

APPEARANCES: 0

Another Australian currently plying his trade at German Bundesliga side Nurnberg, Spiranovic was last year the subject of speculation after Croatian officials contacted to him in a bid to get the highly-rated defender to play for their national team. Spiranovic has already represented Australia at youth level and has committed his future to the green and gold.

Nikolai Topor-Stanley

AGE: 22

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: PERTH GLORY

APPEARANCES: 1

Another of Graham Arnold's star Qantas U23s who have come of age over the last two seasons as the side qualified through the AFC for the first time. Nikolai made his name in the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC before transferring to Perth Glory last season. With a dearth of naturally left-sided players in the national setup, Nikolai is worth his weight in gold.

EDWARD Megs MORRISON

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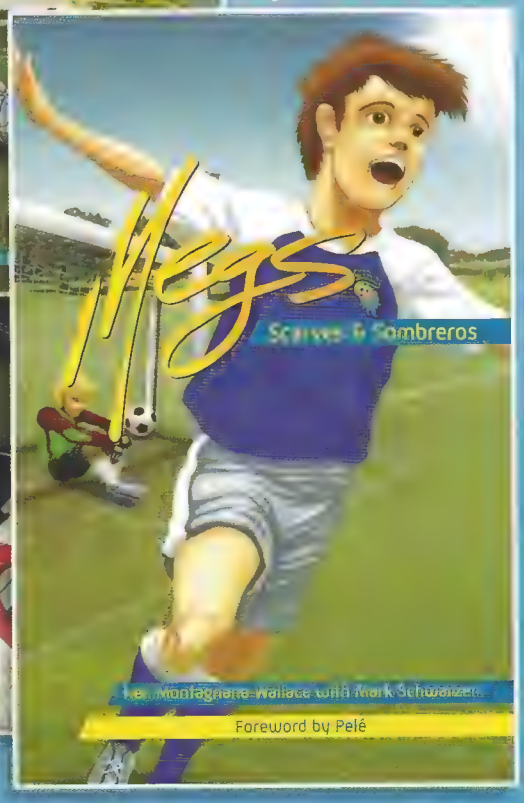

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Rodrigo Vargas

AGE: 29

POSITION: DEFENDER

CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY

APPEARANCES: 0

It's been an incredible two years for Melburnian Rodrigo Vargas. The classy defender only made his debut for Hyundai A-League side Melbourne Victory in 2006, after starring in Victoria's premier league. Since then he has won a Hyundai A-League Championship, has played in the AFC Champions League and has forced his way into Qantas Socceroos reckoning.

Mark Bresciano

AGE: 28

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: PALERMO (ITALY)

APPEARANCES: 40

After representing the Qantas Young Socceroos in 1999 and the Qantas U23s at the Sydney Olympics, Mark has etched out an excellent career in the highly technical Italian Serie A. Clubs such as Empoli, Parma and now Palermo have benefited from his intelligent attacking runs and precision free kicks. One of Australia's stars of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany.

Leigh Broxham

AGE: 20

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY

APPEARANCES: 1

Leigh made his Qantas Socceroos debut coming off the bench in March's friendly against Singapore. He has become a lynchpin of the Victory midfield with his bustling style and assured ball playing. His determination and toughness make up for what Broxham lacks in height, and have ensured his passage from the Under 17 team at the 2004 World Cup to the full Qantas Socceroos side.

Jacob Burns

AGE: 30

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: WISLA KRAKOW (POLAND)

APPEARANCES: 5

Hard-working Jacob debuted for the Qantas Socceroos in Scotland when the Aussies shocked the Scots 2-0 in a friendly eight years ago. He also played in the UEFA Champions League for Leeds before his career stalled in England's lower leagues. His move to Polish side Wisla Krakow rejuvenated him however and he is now on the fringes of the national team.

Nick Carle

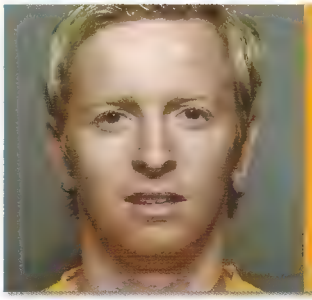
AGE: 26

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: BRISTOL CITY (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 7

Nick is known for his flair and creativity and he can unlock defences with his trickery and vision. He featured in Australia's 2007 AFC Asian Cup campaign, scoring in the penalty shoot-out against Japan and has since played in Turkey and now with Bristol City in England. Nick won the Hyundai A-League's Johnny Warren Medal as the player of the year for 2006/07.



David Carney

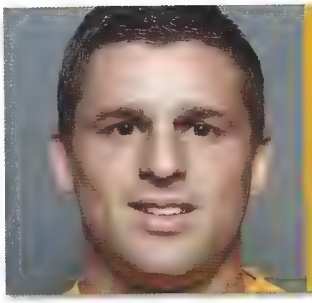
AGE 24

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: SHEFFIELD UNITED (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 8

David is an excitement machine. He caught the eye with some outstanding performances at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup finals, playing in the unfamiliar role of left wing-back. It earned him a contract with ambitious English club Sheffield United after he'd made his name at Sydney FC. Carney scored a brilliant goal for the national team against Nigeria last November.



Jason Culina

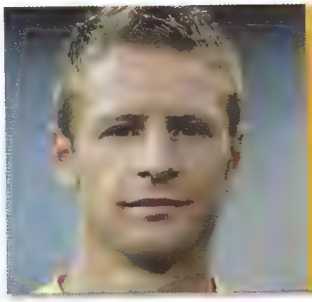
AGE: 27

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: PSV EINDHOVEN (HOL)

APPEARANCES: 29

Jason's mobility, link play and ability to play the ball out of midfield intelligently will be vital on the journey to South Africa for the Qantas Socceroos. He is now considered to be one of the national team's most important players for his consistency and versatility. For PSV this season he played in both the UEFA European Champions League and the UEFA Cup.



Vince Grella

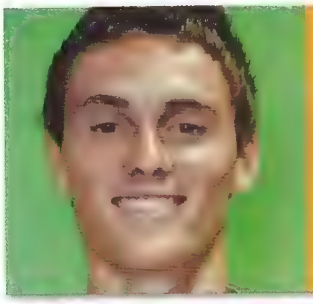
AGE: 28

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: TORINO (ITALY)

APPEARANCES: 33

A hard-working midfielder who closes down opposing players and mops up stray passes, Grella is a vital cog in the Qantas Socceroo engine room. He blossomed with Empoli in Serie A and upon their relegation in 2004 was signed by Parma where he was reunited with his good mate and fellow Qantas Socceroo Marco Bresciano. He currently plays with Torino.



James Holland

AGE: 19

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 1

James's rise to Qantas Socceroo selection has been nothing short of meteoric. At just 18, James broke into the Hyundai A-League with Newcastle Jets during last season. However, the attacking midfielder's running, precision passing, deft free kicks and ability to score caught the eye of Pim Verbeek who gave him his debut in March in the friendly against Singapore.

Mile Jedinak

AGE: 23

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

APPEARANCES: 1

Only a couple of years ago Mile was playing in the New South Wales state league. But after two outstanding seasons with Central Coast in the Hyundai A-League, he has forced his powerful frame into Qantas Socceroos reckoning. A bruiser in midfield, Jedinak will dominate his opponent no matter what it takes and also possess a powerful strike.

Mile Sterjovski

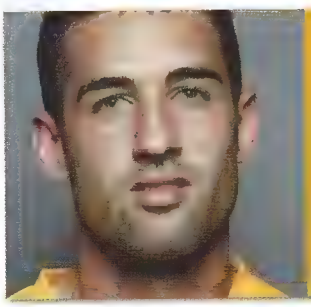
AGE: 29

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: DERBY COUNTY (ENG)

APPEARANCES: 33

Mile is another talented product of the Wollongong football scene. He first got noticed in the late 90s with He moved to Europe in 2000 – first with Lille in France then Switzerland's Basel where he has made his name as an attacking wide midfielder. In January he moved to Derby in England where his class and determination impressed the local fans despite his side's poor run of results.



Carl Valeri

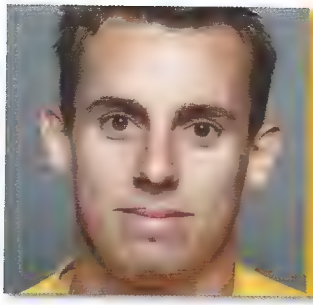
AGE: 23

POSITION: MIDFIELDER

CLUB: GROSSETO (ITALY)

APPEARANCES: 6

The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Qantas Socceroos in March 2007 against China. Carl has played all his professional football in Italy, after he was signed by Inter Milan, who have loaned him out to smaller clubs to gain experience. He is expected to be a regular Qantas Socceroo for years to come.



Luke Wilkshire

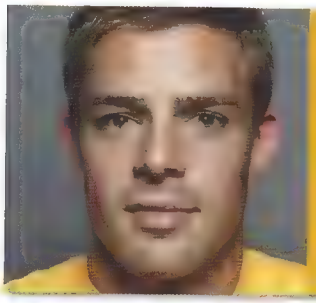
AGE: 26

POSITION: MIDFIELD

CLUB: FC TWENTE (HOLLAND)

APPEARANCES: 22

Playing for the Qantas U23s at the Athens Olympics put Wilkshire in the mix for the Qantas Socceroos. He moved from Middlesbrough to Bristol City in 2003 where regular first team football improved his game, as shown by his impressive displays at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This season he helped his Dutch side FC Twente qualify for the UEFA Champions League.



Daniel Allsopp

AGE: 29

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: MELBOURNE VICTORY

APPEARANCES: 1

This powerful, hard running striker played a major role in Melbourne Victory's blitz of the Hyundai A-League Championship two seasons ago when his consistent strike rate won him the Golden Boot award. Before that Danny represented Australia at U17 level and went on to appear for the Young Socceroos and the Under 23s and played in England for seven years.

Mark Bridge

AGE: 22

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: SYDNEY FC

APPEARANCES: 1

Mark's goal-scoring contribution to Newcastle Jets' Hyundai A-League triumph last season was vital in taking the scoring load off goal-machine Joel Griffiths. At international level, Mark has been an important contributor to the Qantas U23s' successful campaign for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. At 22, Bridge is part of the new generation of Aussie football stars.

Nathan Burns

AGE: 20

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED

APPEARANCES: 2

One of the exciting products of the Hyundai A-League, Nathan Burns' trickery and direct attacking play has impressed fans since he debuted in the second season of Australia's domestic league. He has since graduated to the Qantas Under 23s and full Socceroos sides, and looks to be one of Australia's finest young attacking prospects. He is particularly dangerous when the ball falls to him around the edge of the box.

Bruce Djite

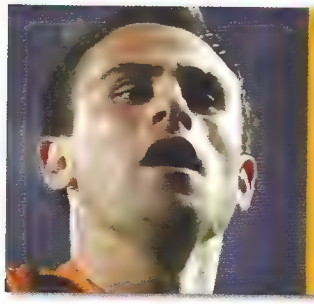
AGE: 21

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: ADELAIDE UNITED

APPEARANCES: 1

Another one of Australia's brilliant youngsters, Djite combines power and athleticism with a growing striker's instinct. American born with African parents, Bruce broke into the Hyundai A-League and terrorised defences with his bustling, brusing style while still a teenager. With all the right physical attributes, Djite looks set for a long career in the Green and Gold.



Richard Garcia

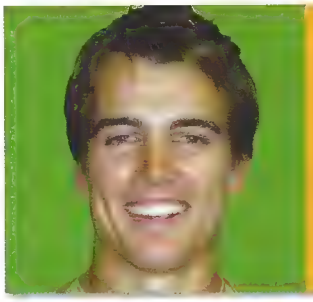
AGE: 27

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: HULL CITY (ENGLAND)

APPEARANCES: 0

As a teenager, Richard Garcia was part of West Ham's famous junior team that included current England internationals Michael Carrick and Joe Cole. He was unable to break into the first team at Upton Park, but a move to the lower leagues reignited his potential. He is now one of the stars for his club side Hull and is becoming a real contender for an attacking berth in the Qantas Socceroos.



Joel Griffiths

AGE: 28

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: NEWCASTLE JETS

APPEARANCES: 2

Last Hyundai A-League season was all Joel's after a stunning display of form from the striker currently on loan in Japan. He was the highest individual goalscorer ever in one season of the Hyundai A-League, and his goals led his team to the Championship. Joel scored on debut for the Qantas Socceroos in 2005 against Jamaica, marking the occasion with a Skippy-style celebration.

Brett Holman

AGE: 24

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: NEC NIJMEGEN (HOL)

APPEARANCES: 13

Brett burst onto the old national league scene as a 17-year-old and was soon snapped up by Dutch giants Feyenoord. He was then loaned out to Excelsior, although the club was later relegated from the Dutch top flight. Brett moved to NEC Nijmegen at the end of the 2006 season – he also debuted for the Qantas Socceroos that year against Bahrain. This season he helped his club qualify for next season's UEFA Cup.

Josh Kennedy

AGE: 25

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: KARLSRUHE (GERMANY)

APPEARANCES: 4

Who could forget big Josh's contribution to the Qantas Socceroos' 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign? After coming on late in the opener against Japan, it was the 192cm striker's presence that unsettled the Japanese defence. He continues to be a dangerous impact player for the Qantas Socceroos. Wodonga-born Josh signed with Karlsruhe midway through the season.

Harry Kewell

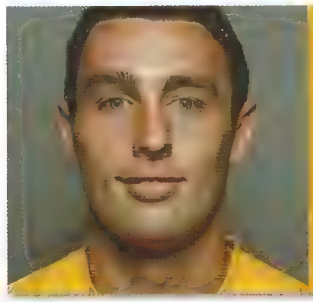
AGE: 29

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: LIVERPOOL

APPEARANCES: 30

Recently voted one of the top five Australian footballers of all time by FourFourTwo magazine, Kewell is an Aussie sports superstar. His performances at the 2006 FIFA World Cup were memorable as was his goal over a decade ago in a FIFA World Cup qualifier against Iran. Despite suffering a series of injuries over the last two years, he's still a huge danger for any team.



Scott McDonald

AGE: 24

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: CELTIC (SCOTLAND)

APPEARANCES: 6

Consistent performances for Motherwell in the Scottish Premier League earned Scott a full international call up for the Qantas Socceroos against Bahrain in 2006. Since then, Melbourne-born Scott has become the hottest Aussie striker in Europe scoring a bagful of goals for Scottish giant Celtic in the league and in the UEFA Champions League. Hehas just helped Celtic to the Scottish league title.

James Troisi

AGE: 19

POSITION: FORWARD

CLUB: NONE PRESENTLY

APPEARANCES: 1

James has been on the fringes of the big-time for a couple of years now. The talented attacking midfielder plays a lot like Harry Kewell – he can take players on, get in a good cross and can score. Having recently been released by Newcastle in the English Premier League, Troisi is keen to prove his worth to get his career back on track, and this match provides the perfect opportunity.

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SUNNY OUTLOOK

We asked some of Queensland's best known football identities how the Sunshine State got its football glow and what the future holds

By Aidan Ormond

For Australia's football fans, it's a subject that's set off hours of heated, passionate, debate: which is the strongest football state in Australia?

You could look at numbers of national team players, levels of registered participants, Hyundai A-League crowds, best performing clubs or national titles. Different criteria, different outcomes – it's one of those arguments that is hard to win but always feisty.

For those arguing for Queensland at the moment though, there is plenty to sing about. There is a boom at grass roots level, a quality production line of talented athletes rising into the state system and progressing on, one Hyundai A-League club with another two on the drawing board and new Queensland-wide competitions launched this year.

Superimposed over these is the growing number of Queenslanders in various national teams and in the Hyundai A-League. It's a state that is clearly a football hotspot.

Queensland's cream

The stats seem to back up this rosy outlook. A 9.3 percent participation rise in Queensland in 2007 has resulted in increased support from the state government to help foster this grass roots boom.

Football Queensland president Dennis O'Brien adds that the code boasts almost 25 percent more participants than any other code of football played in the state.

"The sport has undergone a rapid transformation in recent years and we're very keen to help Football Queensland keep that momentum going," Queensland Minister for Sport Judy Spence trumpeted last year [*see boxout "Club Boom"*].

One man who knows this better than anyone is Frank Farina. The former Qantas Socceroos coach and current boss of Hyundai A-League club Queensland Roar, is a proud Queenslander. And as a coach, he's mentored his fair share of Queenslanders in the national set up.

"The first one that jumps to mind is Craig Moore; he's captained his country, played at Glasgow Rangers for 10 years, played and scored in a World Cup and forged a very successful overseas career.

"Now he's giving back to the game in Australia by playing in the Hyundai A-League and helping the youngsters who are just coming through the national team ranks.

"Second is Steve Corica, who I think is one of only a few players to have come

Craig Moore: Queensland's greatest ever footballer?

Dario Vidosic: already progressing in Europe

Local legend Frank Farina

through every national team from Joeys to Socceroos. He's been around for a long time, was a great player for the national team, and continues to be one of the best players in the Hyundai A-League right now.

"Finally, one for the future and a current Socceroo is Jade North. He's a very talented player just beginning his career with the national team and it's exciting to know that Queensland is producing these kinds of players."

Add to that list Farina's current golden generation at Roar – Robbie Kruse, Michael Zullo and Tahj Minniecon who are joined at Suncorp by Mitch Nichols, Chris Grossman and Griffin McMaster – and watch out for Roar's 16-year-old wing wizard Tommy Oar.

Of course there are others too. Hyundai A-League players such as Sydney FC keeper Clint Bolton, Roar stars Ben Griffin and Matt McKay, Victory's promising keeper Mitchell Langerak and Perth Glory flyer Jimmy Downey are all Queensland-bred.

Overseas, Wayne Shroj, Kasey Wehrman and David Williams are just three doing well while Queensland women Kate McShea, Claire Polkinghorne and Alicia Ferguson are regulars on the international stage.

"In terms of producing players now, you just have to look at the stir that Zullo, Kruse and Minniecon caused last season when they came onto the scene. Now we've also

CLUB BOOM

These are exciting times for Queensland. At Hyundai A-League level, both the Gold Coast and Townsville are vying for a spot in the big league for season five of the competition, starting in 2009/10.

Locally, the new Queensland State League kicked off in March this year. With over $50,000 in prize money up for grabs, the QSL is one of Australia's richest football leagues outside the Hyundai A-League.

The 10-team QSL features five regional clubs based in Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg and the Sunshine Coast, along with Brisbane based clubs Logan United FC, Brisbane Strikers FC, Redlands City Devils, Olympic FC and the QAS.

At grass roots level the Queensland government and corporate sponsors have been jumping on board too. In 2007, $1.6m of state government funding together with corporate sponsorship saw the launch of the Red Kits initiative for grass roots football.

Supported by Red Rooster, this scheme has seen each of the state's 5774 coaches provided with quality training equipment including footballs, bibs and markers.

What's more in 2008, the Rebel Sport Junior Premier League, sponsored by Rebel Sport and RACQ Insurance, sees Queensland's elite juniors competing against each other at the highest level on a weekly basis during winter. The league also includes teams from the far north coast of NSW.

The Roar's golden local boys Robbie Kruse (*left*) and Michael Zullo

got Oar, and Nichols who I think we could see step up and make his mark this season," says Farina.

"It's up to them really, it's in their hands. They've certainly got the talent to represent Australia at the highest level, and it's just a case of them working hard and making it happen.

"Tommy Oar is a great talent; he's passionate, hungry and desperate for a crack at the Hyundai A-League, so we'll see how he goes there and if he does well, then like the others, how far he goes really just depends on how hard he's prepared to work for it."

Room to improve

The Roar boss isn't getting too carried away just yet though. Farina says the state still is lagging in certain areas.

"I think Victoria and New South Wales, when you look at the current national team, are a little ahead, but Queensland is beginning to make its mark and I think in a few years time there are going to be a lot more Queenslanders in the team."

One way to help this growth is local leagues. With the advent of this year's statewide Queensland Soccer League coupled with the Brisbane Premier League and other regional leagues, it's crucial that these competitions improve in all aspects so the jump to Hyundai A-League is not such a stretch.

"There's a lot of talent out there," says Farina of Queensland club football in general. "Michael Zullo was playing in the local league before I signed him last season and I've brought in David Dodd and Tim Smits from the league ahead of this season so we'll see how they go.

"But of course there's always room for improvement. I can't make too much of a judgment on the QSL, as it's only in its first season, but from what I can see it's taken off quite well."

The new national youth league, kicking off in season four of the Hyundai A-League, will provide even more top quality competition for Roar's youth team.

If their bids for inclusion into the Hyundai A-League are accepted, the Gold Coast and Townsville may join the Roar in the competition, thereby providing three youth league teams for Queensland – putting it on par with NSW.

And at junior level, the nationwide rollout of Small-Sided Games, designed to give kids more touches of the ball, better technique and greater enjoyment of the sport, is already having an effect on the quality of Queensland kids' play.

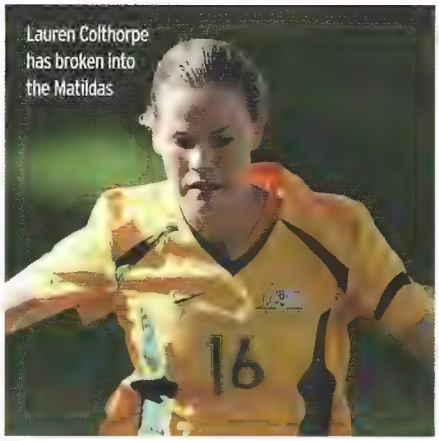
"In a few years time there are going to be a lot more Queenslanders in the [Qantas Socceroos]"

Good times

Providing specialised elite coaching for the best up and comers in Queensland is the job of Mike Mulvey, who coaches the state's best male and female players at the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS).

"There has never been a better opportunity for a young player in Queensland to become a professional footballer. All they need is some talent, a great attitude and desire to achieve," he says.

And Mulvey believes Queensland has much to be proud of in terms of how well its players have performed on the national stage.


Lauren Colthorpe has broken into the Matildas

Claire Polkinghorne is a regular Matilda

Kate McShea (*left*) and new Brisbane local Sally Shipard

If success is measured by players graduating into national teams and professional clubs "then we are fighting above our weight", he says.

"In the last 10 years, Queensland has won the national men's league once and the women's league four times. And we have an established A-League club in the Roar with two other franchises looking strong contenders for 2009."

Currently there are nine QAS graduates on full contracts at the Queensland Roar, eight current QAS scholarship holders in line for the next Australian Institute of Sport intake, plus over a dozen from the women's program in national teams.

It's an impressive snapshot that needs managing by a network of coaches across the vast state. Queensland has 10 regional directors of coaching whose role it is to ensure the development programs are meeting their responsibilities.

"Overall we are doing a good job," says Mulvey. "The aim now must be to do better as we cannot afford to stand still. The advent of small-sided games at the grass roots level should help the development of skill and creativity that will increase the number of potential quality players into the development programs.

"It is imperative we have coaches who are able to educate and nurture these players to be the best they can be.

"The future is very bright here in Queensland."

Clubbing together

Queensland's club football scene has been re-invigorated this year with the introduction of the Queensland State League. It includes the QAS side, which, like the AIS in the Victorian Premier League, can now improve by playing against men.

"Our average age is 16 and a half and playing against men every week, the challenge is daunting but one that the boys have risen to fantastically well," says Mulvey with pride.

At time of writing, QAS sat in mid-table of the 10-team league with only three losses from eight matches.

"The league was primarily put in place to give players an opportunity to push for Hyundai A-League contracts and the early signs are very promising.

"We play with two wingers who are causing many problems for the opposition, one of whom Tommy Oar has just signed a three-year contract with Roar. Hopefully we will see many more

MAROON WOMEN

The women's game has evolved in a big way in the past 10 years in Queensland," notes Mulvey. "We have seen a massive growth in numbers following on from the Matildas' eye catching performances in the AFC Women's Asian Cup and FIFA Women's World Cup."

A scan of the next generation of Matildas in our national Under 20s squad would seem to back this up.

Talented Queenslanders Claire Polkinghorne and Kate McShea have migrated from the Young Matildas to the national squad, where they have joined stalwart Alicia Ferguson.

And poised to step up to the national team are Tameka Butt from the Gold Coast, Brisbane's Elise Kellond-Knight, keeper Casey Dumont and Kim Carroll.

Elsewhere at the QAS, Lauren Colthorpe, Jo Burgess, Karla Reuter and the exciting and talented midfielder Sally Shipard have also joined the program.

"When I started the Queensland Academy of Sport program back in 1999 there was not much depth in the ranks," says Mulvey. "Nowadays we have put lots of players into national teams at all levels with more in the pipeline.

"Parents are falling in love with the game because they see a clear pathway for their kids to play for Australia in FIFA World Cups at junior, youth and senior level."

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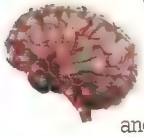

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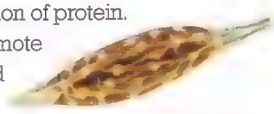

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*Compared to Placebo. Study conducted by NSW Institute of Sport July 2007. For research abstract please refer to www.nsws.com.au **When tested against a placebo by the NSW Institute of Sport, March 2006. For research abstract please refer to www.nsws.com.au

"Queensland is set to become one of the major contributors across many areas of football"

players graduate from the QSL to the Hyundai A-League."

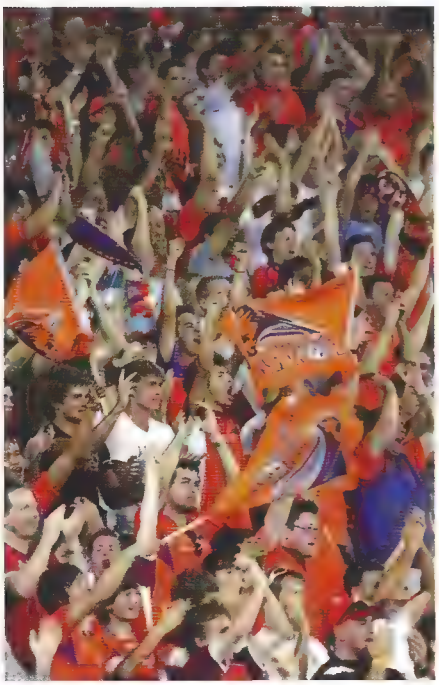
This regional growth is important, says former Queensland Roar and Brisbane Strikers favourite Stuart McLaren, who points to one particular part of the state.

"The Gold Coast seems to be flourishing as a result of a massive population increase added to the dedication and expertise of a few individuals," says McLaren.

"I believe, though, that Queensland more than any other state has responded to the changes our game has seen in recent times and is set to become one of the major contributors across many areas of football in this country," he adds.

Farina agrees: "Queenslanders love their sport and now that the kids have a clearer pathway and local heroes to look up to in the Hyundai A-League, it's exploded.

"The league really has brought the game back to Australia, rather than it just being a game that's popular overseas and in Europe."



A WORD WITH STUART MCLAREN

The former Roar and Brisbane Strikers defender – and now Strikers coach – shares his thoughts on Queensland football

How would you describe the popularity of football in Queensland in 2008?
Quite simply it's on the rise at a rapid rate. The normal measures like the number of registered players, media exposure of the game in general, and interest in the Qantas Socceroos and the Hyundai A-League are all continually increasing which is fantastic considering the influence of other codes in Queensland.

What impact do you think Queensland players have made on the national team?
Everybody recognises the impact players like Frank Farina and Craig Moore have made, but while there have been some other excellent players from Queensland represent the Qantas Socceroos, it perhaps hasn't always been in the numbers that we would like and at times feel that we deserve.

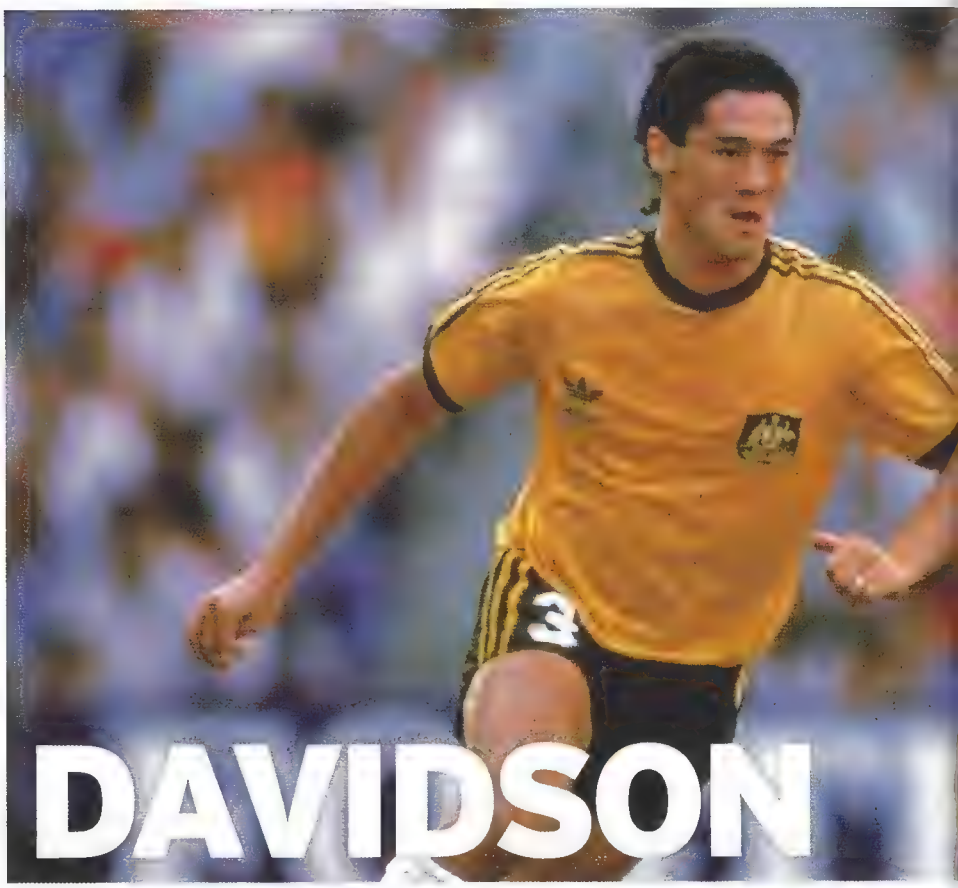
What contribution do you think Queensland has made generally to Aussie footy?
It mirrors that of the contribution made by the players, with some real highlights like the Strikers 1997 NSL Grand Final which gave a very early indication of what a proper national competition could achieve. But overall it could and should be a little more.

How would you describe the junior development system in Queensland both currently and in the past?
The development system in the past has been as good as could be expected when you take into account factors like distance, shortage of funds and a lack of consistent high level competition across all the regions. It has evolved, and should continually do so.

What impact has Queensland's climate had on football in the state?
I wouldn't say we have an advantage as during the winter months we generally don't get any rain and fields can easily become dry and hard which is not conducive to good football, and in summer it is often too hot and humid for anything involving physical activity with the exception of swimming. But we don't complain as there are worse places to live or play football.

GENERATI

We look back at the past and on to the future of the Qantas Socceroos



PAST ALAN DAVIDSON

Alan Davidson was one of Australia's finest footballers in the 1980s and his pedigree took him to the top of the English first division

Growing up in the Melbourne suburb of Altona, Alan Davidson began his career as a teenager in the old national league with the South Melbourne club. Though he played in the midfield as a junior, he established himself as a fullback after volunteering to fill in there for South Melbourne early in his career. Regarded as a cultured, quick defender, through his career Davidson proved extremely adept with the ball at his feet, and his intelligence and technique afforded him the ability to slot in anywhere at the back.

Having played in Australia's first ever Qantas Young Socceroos side in 1979, Davidson soon after made his senior league debut with South Melbourne. Less than a year later, in 1980 he was playing his first match for the Qantas Socceroos.

By the age of 22, Davidson had established himself as a regular in the national side, and overseas opportunities presented themselves. He trialled at several clubs in Europe, including Arsenal and Bayern Munich, yet the difficulty in securing a work permit meant that it was not until 1984 that he finally made his big move.

After spotting him in a friendly tournament, English club Nottingham Forest secured a work permit for Davidson and succeeded in signing him. The club was playing in England's top division and less than five years before had won back to back European Cups.

Davidson secured a spot in the first team at Nottingham Forest but after less than two seasons at the club, he broke three vertebrae in a freak accident during a friendly. The injury cut short his stint in England and he returned

ONS

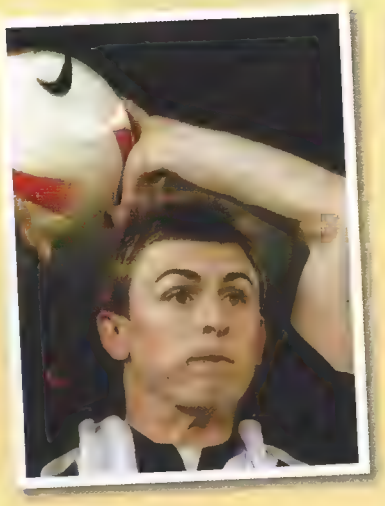
home and took a break from football.

He returned to the game however, and secured a place in the Australian side for the 1988 Olympics. After several successful seasons in the old national league, and having captained the Qantas Socceroos, Davidson wound down his career in Malaysia before having one last season in the national league as a 38-year-old.

He retired from the Qantas Socceroos for the last time in 1992, having played 50 senior internationals and contributed to four FIFA World Cup campaigns. Sadly for this patriotic Australian – he has admitted his emotions during the national anthem can overcome him – he was never to play in a FIFA World Cup finals tournament, but Davidson will still be remembered as a trailblazer of the 1980s.

FUTURE

SEBASTIAN RYALL



Melbourne Victory defender Sebastian Ryall is at the forefront of the next generation of Australian defenders

Sebastian Ryall has been a leader throughout his football career. From his time growing up on Sydney's northern beaches to his experience captaining the Qantas Young Socceroos, Ryall's mature attitude and determined mentality have driven him to success. Now, the 18-year-old has forced his way into his Hyundai A-League side and to the fringes of the Qantas Under 23s: Seb's star is on the rise.

Selected in the 2007 AIS squad, Ryall impressed last year for the Institute in its matches in the Victorian Foxtel Cup state league competition. His performances were not lost on Melbourne Hyundai A-League coach Ernie Merrick, who snapped up the youngster in August last year as one of their mandatory under 20 players.

"We like his leadership skills, he's physically well built and he's technically a very gifted young player who has been a performer for the AIS and the Qantas Young Socceroos," Merrick stated at the time.

The leadership skills Merrick mentioned were a reference to Ryall's role with the Qantas Young Socceroos. Here he has captained the likes of Newcastle Jets midfielder James Holland and Oliver Bozanic from English club Reading to success and qualification to November's AFC Under 19 Championships.

Already Ryall has made his first steps into senior football at Melbourne. With the Victory suffering from injury and form problems last season, the Sydneysider stepped into the breach. In total he started nine matches for the Victory, and came off the bench another five times.

Though he began nervously, as the season concluded he began to look assured for the Victory side who finished the season as the form team of the competition. His efforts were even more impressive given the centre-back was often used in wider roles in defence.

Ryall's form was good enough to warrant a place in the end of season Qantas Under 23s squad. Though selection for Beijing remains a long shot given Australia's outstanding defensive stocks, his potential is obvious considering he will still be eligible for London's 2012 Olympics.

Given his only average height, unless he hits a growth spurt soon Ryall will face a significant challenge to become an elite centre-back. To emulate Alan Davidson's outstanding 50-cap international career would be an amazing achievement.

However, Ryall's maturity and footballing instincts ensure his promise remains huge. Given Seb's development so far, he might just surprise us all.

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SHOOT 'N' SCORE!

QUEENSLAND QUICKIES

1 When was the last Qantas Socceroos match held in Queensland?

2 Who was the opposition?

3 Who were the four Qantas Socceroos to play their last international in that match?

4 This was also the final international for which Paraguay player?

5 Who scored the goals in the 1-1 draw that night?

6 Prior to the above match, which nation provided the opposition for the next most recent international friendly in Queensland in 2000?

7 What was the result that night?

8 When was the last time the Qantas Socceroos were beaten in Brisbane?

9 Who made his debut in 1995's draw with Colombia in Brisbane?

10 Name the player above in action for Australia at The Gabba in a friendly in 2000.

ASIAN EXPERTISE

1 Who was the last non-West Asian player to win the AFC Asian Footballer of the Year Award?

2 Which country has made the AFC Asian Cup final the greatest number of times?

3 When was the last time the host nation won the AFC Asian Cup?

4 How many guaranteed berths to the 2010 FIFA World Cup does the AFC have for its nations?

5 Which confederation will provide the opposition for the fifth-best AFC nation in the final play-off for the 2010 FIFA World Cup?

6 Which AFC nation played Trinidad and Tobago for the final place in the 2006 FIFA World Cup?

7 In how many consecutive FIFA World Cup finals has South Korea now competed?

8 Who was top-scorer at last year's AFC Asian Cup?

9 How many teams will feature in each of the two groups in the AFC's final qualifying stage for the 2010 FIFA World Cup?

10 Which nation represented the AFC at the 1970 FIFA World Cup but is no longer an AFC member?

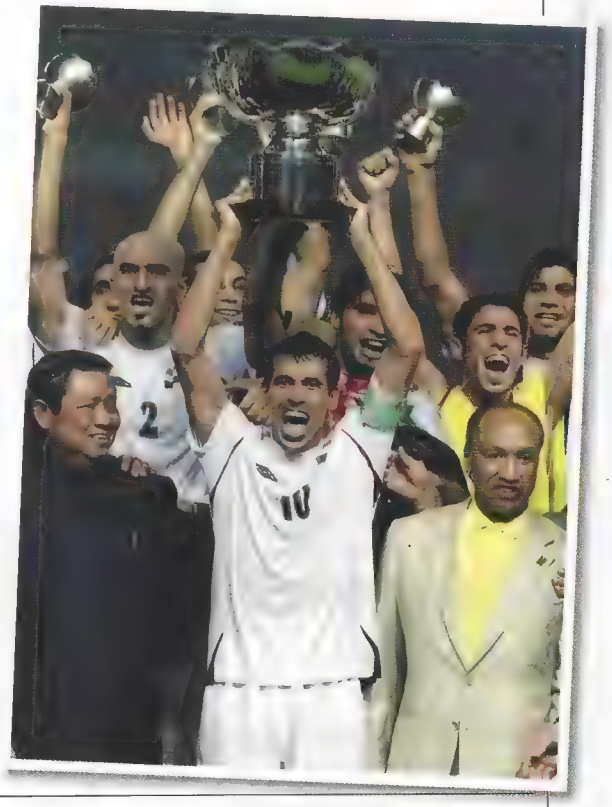
11 Which player is the only one to win the AFC's Player of the Year Award in its current guise more than once?

12 Which city and country house the headquarters of the Asian Football Confederation?

13 What is the nationality of the President of the AFC, Mohammed Bin Hammam?

14 Who are the current AFC Women's Asian Cup champions?

15 Who is holding the main trophy in the photograph below?



ANSWERS! **Asian Expertise 1** Shinji Ono (Japan) in 2002 **2** Saudi Arabia (six) **3** 1992 (Japan) **4** Four **5** Oceania **6** Bahrain **7** Six **8** Younis Mahmoud, Naohiro Takahara and Yasser Al-Qahtani (4 goals each) **9** Five **10** Israel **11** Hidetoshi Nakata (1997 and 1998) **12** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia **13** Qatari **14** China **15** Younis Mahmoud **Queensland Quickies 1** 7 October 2006 **2** Paraguay **3** Zeljko Kalac, Tony Vidmar, Stan Lazaridis and Tony Popovic **4** Carlos Gamarra **5** Tony Popovic and Michael Beauchamp (own goal) **6** Paraguay **7** 0-0 **8** 26 February 1996 by Sweden 2-0 **9** Danny Tiatto **10** Jason Van Blerk

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PETA MCNAUGHTON
THROUGH THE PAIN

Disability support worker Peta McNaughton [*below, left*] doesn't let an injury or two get in the way of her football passion

AGE 26
OCCUPATION Disability support worker

How did you become a football fan?
I've liked it for quite a while and started playing in 2003. Once I started playing and understood what was happening on the field, I got into watching it.

Who got you into it?
My best friend had played it for years and I used to go down and watch her play. But I could never play because I was doing uni and that sort of thing at night. One year when I didn't have anything else to do I started playing. And I tore my quad in my first training session!

What was your first Australia match?
It was Australia versus Japan in Kaiserslautern!

How did you decide to go to Germany?
I was flat on my back at home having just had a foot operation and a friend of mine came over to visit. It was around the time they were doing the ticket draw and she asked, "Do you want to go to Germany?" and I said yeah. So we put our names down thinking we were never going to hear anything, until a couple of weeks later I got an email saying, "You're going to Germany!" I had tickets for the three group games and a conditional ticket if they got to the round of 16. I ended up going to all of them, which was amazing!

Who did you go with?
I went with a girl I played with, Charlie [*pictured, on the right*].

What was your favourite moment?
The last five minutes of the Japan game.

What went through your head during that time?
We were sitting with all the Australian supporters. We were all pretty down because there were only a few minutes to go and we were 1-0 down. Then Timmy Cahill scored and the whole place erupted. It was unbelievable. We were still screaming when he scored the second goal. When Aloisi scored there was this split second silence when everyone thought, "No, this can't be happening." And then it erupted again! It was the most amazing thing.

Who is your favourite player?
Lucas Neill. He's just a machine. I was a very big fan of Harry Kewell, just because... well, he scored for us against Croatia! He got us through! It changes, though. I just love them all.

What happened after you returned from Germany?
I went off soccer for a little bit after the Italy game. I was completely disillusioned. I actually ended up in hospital that night in Kaiserslautern. I was stretched out in all my Australian paraphernalia and had doctors and nurses walking past me – I was on a stretcher in the hallway – they were going, "I watched the game, I'm so sorry, you guys were robbed."

Why were you in hospital?
I fell down the stairs. They thought I'd broken my ankle but I only tore some ligaments.

How good is it to have another Brisbane match?
It's awesome. They came here and played Paraguay not long after the FIFA World Cup. To see the stadium absolutely packed was just amazing. No one ever comes to Brisbane! So everyone – all my soccer mates are over the moon. It's really good, particularly for kids. It sounds really clichéd, but for them to actually see their favourite players, it's just awesome.

As a player and fan, how do you think football is doing in Queensland?
It's definitely changing. It's definitely growing. The growth since the FIFA World Cup when we did so well has been pretty good. I've just seen so many more kids playing, so many more older people playing as well, women going into women's teams. Our soccer club grew from something like three women's teams to about five after the FIFA World Cup, which was pretty awesome.

Who are you going with tonight?
I'm going with Charlie and a bunch of the boys we met over at the FIFA World Cup. I've got friends that don't play, a bunch of people. It's going to be a big night!

Any advice for those planning post-match celebrations?
Don't climb any stairs. Take the elevator!

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IRAQ'S CURRENT FIFA RANKING

29,580,000

POPULATION OF IRAQ

3

MATCHES IRAQ HAS PLAYED (AND LOST) IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP FINALS

2009

YEAR OF IRAQ'S FIRST APPEARANCE AT THE FIFA CONFEDERATIONS CUP

63

INTERNATIONAL GOALS SCORED BY IRAQI RECORD HOLDER HUSSEIN SAEED IN 126 APPEARANCES

58

KILOMETRES OF IRAQI COASTLINE (APPROXIMATELY 1.6% OF ITS BOUNDARIES)

NUMBER OF MOBILE TELEPHONES IN IRAQ **10 900 000**

1.840

PERCENTAGE OF VALUE OF IRAQI EXPORTS OTHER THAN PETROLEUM

lotto

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